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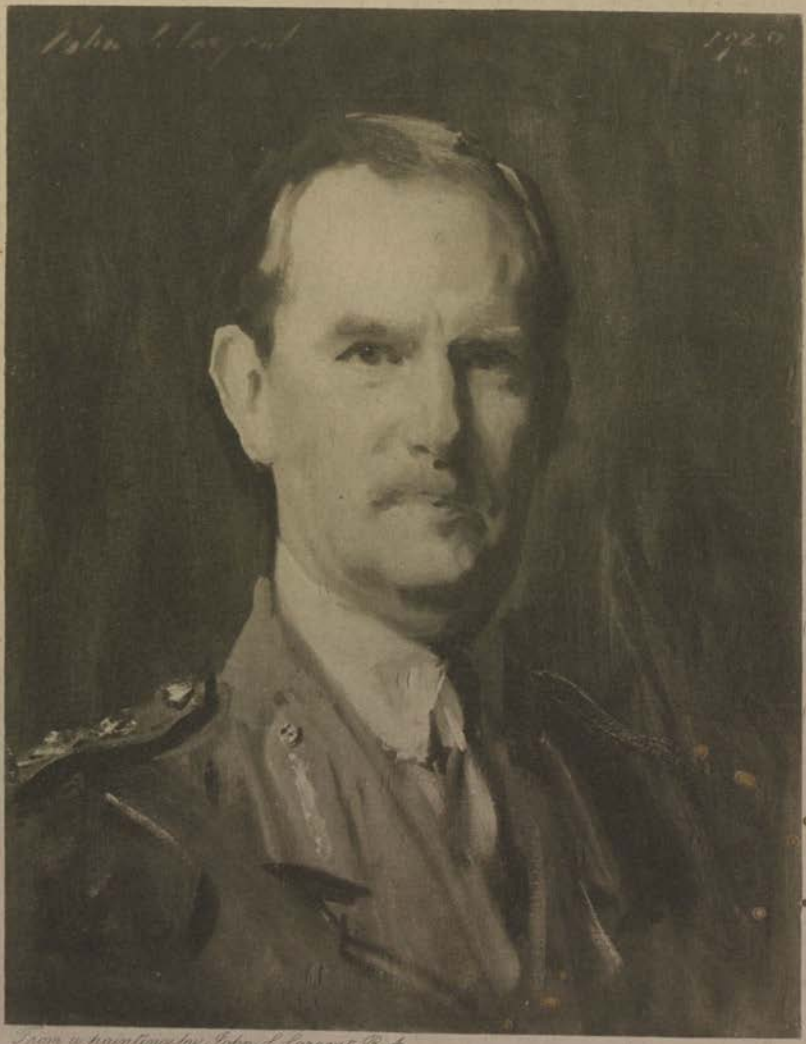
GENERAL SIR JOHN COWANS, G.C.B.

The Quartermaster-General of the Great War.



From the painting by John S. Sargent, R.A.

General Sir John Steven Cowans, G.C.B.

General Sir John Cowans

G.C.B., G.C.M.G. :: The Quartermaster-General of the Great War ∴ ∴ By Major Desmond Chapman-Huston & Major Owen Rutter ∴ ∴

With an Introduction by
Field-Marshal SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON, Bt.,
G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

23973

ILLUSTRATED

VOL. I.

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO
PATERNOSTER ROW
1924

23973

Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice.--OTHELLO.

1914-1918.

TO THE INCOMPARABLE GLORY

OF

THE OLD CONTEMPTIBLES

AND OF

THE NEW ARMIES

This account of the life work of a Comrade
who never let them down.

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INTRODUCTION

I HAVE been asked to write an introduction to this story of the life of a distinguished officer, and although it is a privilege to comply with the request, I cannot claim to have been in any way intimately connected with Sir John Cowans until the outbreak of the Great War, and therefore cannot speak from first-hand knowledge about his career previous to that time.

For the greater part of 1914—18, however, we were very closely associated, and I was probably in a better position than any other officer in the Army to appreciate the value of his work during that period. How important an element his work was in the prosecution of the War can be understood if regard be had to the duties for which the three principal military officers at the War Office were severally responsible. They may be summarised thus :

(*a*) The Adjutant-General recruited the men required to bring and keep the Army up to strength.

(*b*) The Quartermaster-General provided these men with what they wanted to enable them to fight—food, clothing, equipment, and transport—and moved them by land and sea to the places where they were sent to fight.

(*c*) The Chief of the Imperial Staff, in accordance

with plans of operation approved by the Government, distributed the men between the different theatres of war and decided the principle upon which the fighting was to be done.

Obviously the success of the operations depended upon the manner in which the duties at (*b*) were carried out, for troops cannot be expected to fight well unless they are well fed, clothed, and equipped.

It is no exaggeration to say that, eventually, these conditions were better fulfilled in the British Army than in any other army which took part in the War, and while the General Staff were sometimes accused of misdirecting the operations, and the Adjutant-General's Staff of mishandling the personnel, the work of the Quartermaster-General's Staff was seldom criticised and then as a rule not on matters of much importance.

The British Empire was fortunate in having at the head of affairs two such men as Lord Kitchener and Sir John Cowans. Both were men of big ideas, who thought in big figures and quantities. I have never been able to imagine any soldier besides Lord Kitchener having either the vision or the courage, on the outbreak of war, to set about the creation of six new Armies and later to double the strength of the Territorial Force. Nor were there many, if any, soldiers of the standing of Sir John Cowans who would have kept abreast of the War Minister's vast schemes by boldly arranging to provide the animals, vehicles, clothing, and other war material on the gigantic scale required to give practical effect to them.

To the value of Sir John Cowans's work on the Western Front I can testify as Quartermaster-General of the British Expeditionary Force during the first six months of the War, and afterwards as Chief of the General Staff at General

Headquarters during 1915. It fell to the Department over which he presided to replace, from the most meagre stocks, the heavy losses sustained in clothing, equipment and transport during the retreat from Mons; afterwards to meet innumerable requisitions for trench-warfare appliances and material, of many kinds and in quantities far exceeding all previous preparation and experience; and in a hundred different ways to help the sorely-tried Divisions to withstand the hardships encountered during that first terrible winter spent in the trenches of Flanders. To full stomachs and warm clothing may largely be attributed the splendid powers of endurance displayed by the troops at that time. Moreover, the Department not only met our needs with promptitude, so far as that was possible, but it often anticipated them and never irritated us by unnecessarily questioning their justification.

In some of our previous wars—in the Crimea, for example—the administrative services had been lamentably bad, and became the subject of investigation and severe condemnation. Seeing how utterly inadequate our pre-war preparations were, there would have been every excuse for similar breakdowns in the Great War, but nothing of the kind occurred except in Mesopotamia, and responsibility for it rested with the India Office and not with the War Office. By 1916 the position in that theatre had become so hopeless that I was obliged to ask the Government to withdraw both operative and administrative control from India and the India Office and vest them in the War Office. This was approved, and thereafter Sir John Cowans was instrumental in placing on a proper administrative footing what had hitherto been the most mismanaged campaign of the whole War.

Before 1914 any one of the four campaigns which we

undertook in the Near and Middle East would have been considered a military operation of the first rank, and the efficient maintenance of such large forces as were employed there, so far away from home and in addition to meeting the wants of the main armies on the Western Front, was an administrative achievement which has never been equalled. It was the more meritorious because the conditions obtaining in the several theatres of operations differed considerably in many ways, and this complication was aggravated by the frequent transfer of troops from one theatre to another. Clothing, equipment, and even food, suitable for France, might be quite unsuitable for the Balkans or Mesopotamia.

The transport also varied considerably. In one theatre mechanical vehicles would be best, in another mules would be wanted, in another camels, in another river-craft, and so on. The provision of sea-transport, of the right kind and at the right time, was another difficulty. Alterations in the relative importance of strategical objectives created many administrative problems of this nature, but, speaking from my experience as Chief of the Imperial General Staff during 1916-18, the Quartermaster-General's Department invariably managed to solve them, and so enabled the General Staff to carry out the dispositions which they had in view. No better examples of effective combination between the operative and administrative branches of the Staff exist than those furnished at certain periods by the distant campaigns in the Great War.

Like most successful men Sir John Cowans owed a great deal to the assistance which he received from his subordinates, as he would have been the very first to admit. But however capable subordinates may be, good results will never be produced unless the necessary

inspiration and direction are forthcoming from the top, and in this respect it may safely be said that the services rendered by Sir John during that part of our history to which these notes refer, entitle him to be regarded as one of the ablest Quartermaster-Generals that the British Army has ever had.

AUTHORS' PREFACE

THE writers of this biography have enjoyed the disadvantages (and the advantages) of having had little or no access to official information or documents. The disadvantages, such as they are, are obvious; the advantages are not perhaps so immediately apparent. Official assistance necessarily entails some measure of official supervision, and may even mean official editing; it will, at least, impose a reticence that may well prove embarrassing —or worse; because, carried too far, reticence degenerates into caricature.

Official biographies and authorised biographies are apt to be dull and lifeless things. What is in some measure lost by the absence of official assistance and authority may well be compensated for by the retention of that freedom which is the birthright of letters.

Neither of the writers had the wish, nor indeed the ability, to try and compose the pompous, conventional mausoleum so dear to an earlier generation. Cowans was too human and vital, too lovable, for such an unmerited fate; it is one that would have been equally abhorrent to his hatred of humbug and his quenchless sense of humour. The aim was to try and present a modest picture of a very attractive and remarkable man, and record something of a war task unique in history.

Although, when he was so minded, few could surpass Cowans at writing a clear, concise and forceful official minute or memorandum, he was in no sense, by either instinct or training, a man of letters; his private correspondence, if very large, was also very scrappy and chatty and, almost without exception, unsuitable for quotation. Moreover, the number of letters written by him that have been preserved are unbelievably few. He himself preserved none, making it a rule to destroy all letters immediately they were answered.

Generous assistance from scores—indeed hundreds—of the friends of the late Quartermaster-General has been showered upon us. Everyone was eager to do his utmost to help to make a memorial of a valued friend and comrade and a great life-work. All said they were glad that at last his achievements were to have the recognition of being to some extent recorded.

No one could be more conscious than the writers of the shortcomings of these pages. In their desire not to stand between Cowans as seen by his intimate friends, his colleagues, his subordinates, and the reader, it may be that they have too often quoted direct instead of paraphrasing; yet, as General Altham says, "the full history of the manner in which this time of strain and improvisation, of creation and construction, was tackled by Sir John Cowans, can only be compiled from War Office records and from the testimony of those who had the privilege to serve under him at the War Office." Therefore, following the example of Boswell, to quote in full such testimony has seemed the wisest course.

A true paraphrase is a difficult achievement even where the writer is well known to the person who attempts it. Moreover, many, indeed all of the writers quoted, are by

virtue of their name, their special knowledge, or their close friendship or association with Cowans, entitled to speak in the first person, and their observations gain greatly in authority and value by the fact. For the most part specific permission was given to make use of the contribution as we thought fit; in some instances such permission may have been inadvertently taken for granted; if so, we would beg for forgiveness.

It may be that it is as yet too early to assess the achievements of Cowans with anything like completeness or finality; but it did seem desirable, before men's memories grow cold, to collect and record what was possible of a temperament that was pre-eminently warm and human, and of a task that was in a singular degree carried through successfully by the sheer force of a strong and vivid personality. Perhaps one day the official Administrative History of the War may be written by someone with a courage undaunted by the vastness of the task and the mountains of documents that will have to be co-ordinated and consulted.

The career of Cowans was in no sense a spectacular one; the writers have had none of the extrinsic and invaluable help lent to a biography by the mere recital of famous historic scenes or battles. The extraordinary fascination which mere destructiveness has always had, and it may be assumed always will have, for mankind, lends no glamour to these pages. There is, however, the fascination of magnitude in an unexampled degree; and the unending interest human beings will always take in a man who accomplished the greatest task of its kind in history.

There is also to a superlative extent the personal attraction of the man; it was of that very rare quality which

is equally potent with men and women, with civilians and with soldiers. While Cowans cannot be credited with a great intellect there was in him a fundamental and towering humanity which, like a lighthouse in the dark, attracted every eye, held every interest, and warmed and encouraged every hope. One principal reason for this was that he literally obeyed Herbert Spencer's injunction to " remain a boy as long as you can."

His one hatred was hypocrisy; his one impatience pompous stupidity and dullness; his one aversion inefficiency; and his chief claim to personal sympathy and comprehension is that he never presumed to judge any man.

It is difficult even now to understand why his great achievements were unrecognised and why he himself, both in his personal capacity and as the representative of the Administrative Services, went to his grave unrewarded. May it not be that the very silence with which his work was received is in itself a unique testimonial to its complete success?

Few men were ever better loved or appreciated in the Army; surely no man ever had the immense consolation and reward of knowing that through his work uncounted numbers of soldiers were cared for, helped, encouraged, and stayed in the face of horror, disaster and death. A full belly is a great begetter of a stout heart, and a man warmed and comforted can be a hero in circumstances that otherwise would break his courage and spirit. From a foot-salve to an altar, or a pack of cards to a Shakespearian recital, Cowans could anticipate and joyfully provide for men, because he was himself so completely a man. It was this in him that insisted that the Women's Legion and the Women's Auxiliary Services should have becoming

uniforms because, as he said, "the men saw ugliness enough."

A Staff College man, and one who thoroughly appreciated its training, Cowans was the ruthless enemy of the office arm-chair Staff Officer. He insisted that ten minutes on the spot examining the position at first hand was more illuminating and more valuable than all the reports in the world. He was never an office man himself, nor did he ever allow his imagination and humanness to become sterilised by immersion in the details of conducting a great Department. Like Napoleon he could go into the most minute detail at will, and like Napoleon he never did so unless it was imperative. He kept his mind free, fresh and unharassed for the big questions.

He realised more clearly than is given to many what a Staff is for and he insisted on it fulfilling its proper functions. Himself liking freedom in which to move and work he amply accorded it to others. He hated to be deprived or to deprive others of elbow room. In this respect he was the exact opposite to men like Lord Kitchener, Sir Charles Douglas, Sir Henry Sclater and Sir Stanley Maude.

Two incidents will in this connection illustrate his attitude—perhaps from slightly different points of view. He issued orders that all the Commands in the United Kingdom should submit to him monthly a statement showing the number of troops drawing rations, the number of rations wholly or partially underdrawn, the savings effected in cash and in kind, the by-products conserved, and many other details. In each command the return occupied several foolscap pages; when they reached the War Office his Staff there had to summarise them on half a sheet of notepaper, before

submitting them to him. In fact he was in the habit of asserting that so far as Army Administration was concerned everything worth saying could be said on half a sheet of notepaper. No doubt this was to some extent a reaction from the excessive love of long reports and a deliberately calculated protest. It was, anyhow, his constant policy throughout his career.

He shared Lord Haldane's belief in getting things done by personal interviews, and followed Lord Haldane's practice of exercising the right to send for any of his subordinates he chose, without putting the matter through what is known in the Army as " the usual channels." In this way he always knew what was going on.

The second illustration of this characteristic involves retelling a story that has, it is to be feared, become a classic in the Army. Cowans, like all good story-tellers (and he was an excellent one), always represented it as having come under his personal observation while serving in India—in those days the elysium of the routine-wallah. The story is certainly typical of the inveterate arm-chair Staff Officer who judges everything on paper and decides all things on precedent and regulation.

A certain Brigadier whose command was geographically extensive applied for an extra charger to enable him properly to carry out his inspection duties. His request was returned endorsed with something like the following minute: " This application is not understood; your command is only thirty miles across as the crow flies."

The Brigadier, not to be defeated, minuted it back to Command Headquarters as follows: " I agree; and have the honour most respectfully to enquire if it is proposed that I should ride a crow? "

Cowans's own belief that he was the victim of a political

intrigue, and that trivial errors of judgment were eagerly seized upon and shamelessly magnified for the purpose of discrediting him and causing him to be removed from his post, may either be accepted or dismissed. It is one which, for the present, can hardly be decided either way. If it was true it explains many things; if not, the situation is perhaps more puzzling still, because the eminence and number of those who believe and say he did great things is so incontestable, the inevitable element of detraction so small and negligible, that it would seem impossible that he should have gone unrequited.

Cowans believed he had reason to consider Mr. Lloyd George was not his friend either as Minister of Munitions, Secretary of State for War, or Prime Minister, and that he, either deliberately or through carelessness, omitted the Administrative Services when the thanks of Parliament to the Army was being drafted; it is only fair therefore to record the fact that when, as Prime Minister, he spoke in the House of Commons on the results of the campaign in Mesopotamia he, next after Sir Stanley Maude, ascribed the success obtained there to the reorganisation of the Transport Services by Sir John Cowans and his Staff.

The help given to the writers has been so widespread and so generous that it is hardly possible to do more than mention it.

To those whose words have been quoted in full in the text we offer thanks which, however sincere and warm, must always be inadequate; the reader will be able to judge of the extent of our indebtedness.

We would further record with the utmost gratitude the generous and friendly assistance we have received from Sir Robert Allison, Mr. Asquith, Mrs. Atkinson, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert L. Barclay, Major-General

F. C. Beatson, Lieutenant-General Sir William Pitcairn Campbell, Colonel Arthur G. Churchill, Brigadier-General George Cockburn, Lieutenant-Colonel the Honourable Wenman Coke, Sir James T. Currie, Sir Archibald Edmonstone, Lieutenant-General Sir Gerald Ellison, Major Sir Henry Fairfax-Lucy, Captain the Honourable Evelyn FitzGerald, Miss E. J. Fullerton, Sergeant W. E. Govier of the Rifle Brigade, Mr. Wilfred Gronow, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, Sir John P. Hewett, Mr. Harry Weldon Heywood, Major Jack Inglis, Mr. Arthur Jelf, Lieutenant-Colonel Rudolf C. Jelf, Lieutenant-Colonel Auberon Kennard, Lieutenant-Colonel E. Larken, Dr. Gwynne Lawrence, Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Lloyd, the Marchioness of Londonderry, Mr. Ian Macpherson, Lieutenant-Colonel H. O. Mance, Lord and Lady Massereene and Ferrard, Lord Milner, Mr. Trevor St. Patrick Molony, Major-General Sir Robert Montgomery, Major the Honourable Harold Pearson, Miss Doris Phillips, Major-General T. D. Pilcher, Lieutenant-Colonel G. T. Rawnsley, Major Louis Reynolds, Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Colonel Sir Alexander Sprot, Colonel H. V. de Satgé, the Honourable Sir Arthur Stanley, Lieutenant-General the Honourable Sir Richard Stuart-Wortley, Mrs. Cairns Wicks, Colonel W. K. Tarver, Baron de Tscharner, Captain Bernard S. Townroe, Colonel Sir Edward Ward, Major Ronald Wilberforce and Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick E. Whitton.

It is not too much to say that the first chapter could not have been written without the invaluable and unfailing help of Mr. James Walter Brown,[1] who has been for many years past Secretary and Director of Messrs. Cowans, Sheldon and Company ; it also owes much to the

[1] Author of *Round Carlisle Cross.*

friendly assistance of Mr. T. Wilson Fish, and Mr. R. Charles Longridge. Sir Thomas Putnam, the present head of the Darlington Forge, Limited, was also so good as to read the chapter and help us concerning the history of that Company and of Cowans, Sheldon and Company.

Lord Haldane gave us permission to make what use we wished of *Before the War*; to Mr Harold Baker we are much indebted for permission to quote from *The Territorial Force*, and to Mr. Winston Churchill we offer our thanks for the use he allowed us to make of *The World Crisis*. General Callwell's *Life of Sir Stanley Maude* was used not only to quote from but to supplement our knowledge of the campaign in Mesopotamia. To Mr. Isaac Marcosson's *The Business of War*, written when the great ordeal was at its height, we owe much for its lively pictures of what the Irishman described as "life at the back of the front." By permission we quote at the end of Volume I. a passage from the late Sir Julian Corbett's *Naval Operations*. Colonel Charles Melville very courteously allowed us to make some quotations from his *Life of General Sir Redvers Buller*; and Mr. Edmund Candler unreservedly placed at our disposal his inimitable account of the Mesopotamian Campaign, *The Long Road to Baghdad*. Major-General Sir George Younghusband was equally generous concerning his *A Soldier's Memories*.

To Sir Herbert Creedy, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for War, we owe our warm and sincere thanks for numberless courtesies and much valuable help; while we are only one of a long list of writers on military or semi-military affairs who owe to Mr. F. J. Hudleston, the War Office Librarian, more than it is possible to say. With the approval of Sir Herbert Creedy the services of

Mr. Hudleston himself, of his Staff, and the resources of the Library were placed at our disposal in the most whole-hearted, generous and efficient fashion.

Brigadier-General F. J. Moberly, of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, not only gave us encouragement and such help as no one else could, but we are much indebted to his volume of the History of the Great War on *The Campaign in Mesopotamia.*

Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy Shaw's knowledge concerning the first remount scheme was very valuable, particularly as he took part in its inception and approached the question from the angle of a Staff officer who had actually to face personally the task of helping in the country to make horse registration a success.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the account of the enlarged and revised remount and registration scheme which Cowans brought into operation after he became Quartermaster-General is almost the sole work of Lieutenant-General Sir George MacMunn. He has also helped us in many other ways, and his personal experiences on the Q.M.G.'s Staff at the War Office, as Q.M.G. in Mesopotamia, and from 1920 till 1923 as Q.M.G. in India, lends the greatest weight to anything he says or endorses regarding the Administrative Services of the Army. He further did us the great service of reading the MS., and was good enough to approve of what we have written.

We were again greatly fortunate in securing the advice and active assistance of Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Altham. Long before the European War broke out General Altham was by general consent regarded as one of the most brilliant and able Administrative Staff

officers in this or any other Army. The early days of the War found him successfully solving the immense difficulties inseparable from the life of the great improvised amateur Armies on Salisbury Plain; a little later, he tackled and surmounted triumphantly even greater difficulties in other theatres of war. Like General MacMunn he was for years in the closest touch with Cowans and saw for himself the work of the Q.M.G. in no less than three campaigns. His appreciation of his old Chief seemed to us so valuable that we have included it as an appendix to the second volume of this book.

To the United States Military Attaché and to his courteous Assistant, Major D. H. Gillette, we offer our thanks for obtaining and placing at our disposal information concerning the American Expeditionary Force, and for assisting us in other ways.

To Colonel G. L. Riggi, the Italian Military Attaché, we are equally grateful for his friendly help.

The task of reading the MS. was an unusually formidable one; yet it was cheerfully undertaken by Sir Reginald Brade, Major-General Sir Robert Whigham, Sir Sefton Brancker, and, as already mentioned, by Sir George MacMunn.

Perhaps some day the British public may be told what we owe to Sir Reginald Brade for his work throughout the War. As Secretary of the War Office he had a task as gigantic as it was unique, and it is no secret to the initiated that he carried it out brilliantly. The most modest of men, although he read and corrected the whole MS. with meticulous care, we dare not let him see this Preface!

General Whigham read the MS. not only from the point of view of a friend and colleague of Cowans, but from

that of a high Staff Officer who has specialised in the work of the Adjutant-General's Department, and who at this moment occupies the great post of Adjutant-General to the Forces and Second Military Member of the Army Council.

General Brancker was one of Cowans's most intimate friends, his warm admirer, and his one-time subordinate in India, and he read and criticised the MS. from these standpoints.

The Indian chapters were read by Major-General Sir Francis Bond, Major-General Sir Wilfrid Malleson and Brigadier-General F. J. Moberly, all three of whom were contemporaries of Cowans in India and had opportunities of knowing him and seeing his work for themselves. General Bond had for Cowans a warm friendship and affection that lasted for some sixteen years.

Lord Haldane, Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Bethune and Major-General Sir William Fry most kindly read and advised us on the chapter concerning the Territorial Force. With that Force and its success the name of Lord Haldane will ever be associated; General Bethune was the immediate successor of Cowans as Director-General; while General Fry, as his Deputy, assisted Cowans while he actually occupied that post.

Brigadier-General G. P. Bourcicault was so good as to read and criticise those parts of the book dealing with supplies during the period immediately preceding the War; and Brigadier-General Sir Alfred Balfour very kindly did the same for the passages concerning No. 1 Port (Southampton), and helped us in other ways.

To Major G. M. A. Graham we are indebted for a very full and graphic account of the rise and progress of Army Waste Products, Limited—the Company with a capital of 7s.—only 6s. of which was paid up!

We have availed ourselves of the permission of His Majesty's Stationery Office to quote extensively from the *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War*, collated and arranged under the supervision of Sir Herbert Creedy, and which is a marvel of industry and skill. For our purpose this proved an intensely interesting and important document, since it contains Cowans's Report on the Supply Services, which is, in fact, his own summary of the results attained by the Quarter-master-General's Department and which sets forth, in the impersonal language of an official report, the supreme achievement of his career.

His Majesty's Stationery Office has also permitted us to quote from the *Report of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, which has been invaluable in dealing with the period when Cowans was responsible for the transportation of troops to the Cape.

Our indebtedness to these historic documents is so obvious to a reader that we have deliberately avoided unnecessarily encumbering our pages with numerous footnotes. The remaining books which have been consulted are given in the Bibliography.

Last, but most certainly by no means least, we would warmly record our gratitude to Mrs. Owen Rutter, Miss Frances Alexina Todd and Mr. Campbell Dunlop for help requiring patient, unselfish enthusiasm of the highest order.

In a book containing so many military names as this it is always difficult to decide the best procedure to adopt. It is perhaps advisable to say that when a person is first mentioned in the text we accord his contemporary rank, adding in brackets, where known, the highest rank he subsequently attained, thus: Major Blank (Lieutenant-

General the Right Honourable Sir Augustus Blank, G.C.B.); thereafter always using the informal and convenient General Blank.

For the frontispiece to Volume I. we are deeply grateful to Mr. Sargent, who placed at our disposal the brilliant study he made of Cowans for inclusion in his great work in the National Portrait Gallery, a reproduction of which is, by permission of the Director, included in Volume II.

The frontispiece to Volume II. is from a portrait in the possession of the Naval and Military Club, and is reproduced by courtesy of the Chairman (Colonel Henry F. Askwith, C.M.G.) and the Committee.

The photograph of Woodbank, the birthplace of Cowans, was specially taken for this book by Mr. George Henry Hill, of Carlisle.

Notwithstanding official example, it has been thought best to adopt the term European War, as the repetition of the expression Great War becomes tedious and may some day become meaningless; the one exception being in the title, where it has been used for the sake of brevity.

D. C.-H.
O. R.

LONDON,
Autumn, 1924.

PROMOTIONS

Sandhurst: 10th February, 1880, aged seventeen.
Second Lieutenant: 2nd January, 1881, aged eighteen.
Lieutenant: 1st July, 1881, aged nineteen.
Captain: 3rd September, 1890, aged twenty-eight.
Major: 9th March, 1898, aged thirty-six.
Lieutenant-Colonel: 28th March, 1900, aged thirty-eight.
Colonel: 16th April, 1903, aged forty-one.
Major-General: 21st March, 1910, aged forty-eight.
Lieutenant-General: 28th October, 1915, aged fifty-three.
General: 1st January, 1919, aged fifty-seven.

ORDERS, DECORATIONS AND MEDALS

British

1902. Member of the Royal Victorian Order, Fourth Class. For special services at the War Office in connection with the Coronation of His Majesty King Edward VII.

1911. Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (Civil Division). On the occasion of the Coronation of His Majesty King George V.

1913. Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (Military Division).

1918. Grand Cross of the Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George.

1918. Knight Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England.

1919. Grand Cross of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (Military Division).

Medals

1902.	King Edward VII.	Coronation Medal
1903.	King Edward VII.	Durbar Medal.
1910.	King George V.	Coronation Medal.

Foreign

Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour.
Order of the Crown of Belgium.
Order of the Crown of Italy.
United States Distinguished Service Medal.
Grand Cordon of the Sacred Treasure of Japan.
Chinese Order of Chia-Ho, Second Class. Ta shon.
Order of the Holy Redeemer of Greece.

STAFF SERVICES

Attached A.G. 7, War Office, January, 1892.

Staff Captain, Headquarters of Army, 13th June, 1893, to 31st August, 1894.

Brigade Major, 2nd Infantry Brigade, Aldershot, 1st September, 1894, to August, 1897.

Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General, Headquarters of Army, 11th May, 1898, to 15th April, 1903.

Assistant-Quartermaster-General, 2nd Division, Aldershot Army Corps, 16th April, 1903, to 28th February, 1906.

Director-General of Military Education, India, 22nd March, 1906, to 4th December, 1908.

Officer in Charge of Training and Staff Duties Section Headquarters, India, 22nd March, 1906, to 4th December, 1908.

Brigade Commander, Calcutta Brigade, India, 5th December, 1908, to 21st October, 1910.

Director-General of the Territorial Forces, War Office, 7th November, 1910, to 2nd June, 1912.

Quartermaster-General to the Forces and 3rd Military Member of the Army Council, 3rd June, 1912, to 15th March, 1919.

Subscribers and others, wishing to purchase Early Second Hand copies of this work are requested to send their names to the Sales Manager, who will forward particulars of price as soon as the book can be spared for sale.

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General Sir John Cowans, G.C.B.

VOLUME I

CHAPTER I

1862—1881

Family origin—Known as "Jack" almost from infancy—Lovable characteristics—Boyishness—Primarily a man of business—His Grandfather, Willie Cowans—His remarkable father, John Cowans—The foundation of Cowans, Sheldon and Company—The firm's rise to prosperity—The Steven Family—The marriage of John Cowans described by a contemporary—Jack's appearance as a child—Family leaves Carlisle for London—Settles at Hartlands—His father's death—His mother—Italian blood—Family influences—His uncle and guardian, Mr. Aymer Ainslie—Mr. Ainslie's character and influence—Dr. Burney's Academy—His opinion of his pupil—Sandhurst—Put under arrest on first Parade—Passes out with distinction—Poor horsemanship—Volunteers for Active Service in Zulu War and is refused—Nomination for Commission in the Rifle Brigade given by the Duke of Connaught—Sails for India.

From quiet homes and first beginning,
Out to the undiscovered end,
There's nothing worth the wear of winning
But laughter and the love of friend.
—HILAIRE BELLOC.

LIKE the greater number of distinguished men, John Steven Cowans came of plain middle-class stock and, except in a very remote degree, could claim no aristocratic ancestors on either side. He was born at Woodbank, near Carlisle, on March 11, 1862, and was baptised

at Upperby Church three months later, his father John Cowans being a partner in an engineering firm which had works at Woodbank and Carlisle.

This account of the man and his work will show that he owed everything in life to himself, albeit he was not born without many advantages. His success in life was built on two main elements, one purely personal and the other general. From his earliest years he was known by what foreigners so aptly describe as his "little name." He became a full General, a senior member of the Army Council, a Knight Grand Cross of the most Honourable Order of the Bath, and, during the most terrible War in history, earned fame as the greatest Quartermaster since Moses and yet contrived to remain plain "Jack" Cowans.

He came of north country stock. Before the year 1824 we know nothing of his grandfather, William Cowans, beyond the fact that he was a married man. He is the first of his family with whom we are acquainted. From the character and status of his wife we may legitimately deduce that he was a man of considerable personality and attraction. In a period when such occurrences were much rarer than they are now he married, probably at Belford, in Northumberland, Miss Elizabeth Isabella Greenwood, the daughter of John Greenwood, who at Belford owned considerable heritable property. Mr. Greenwood later resided at Berwick-on-Tweed, and his will, dated December 13, 1823, mentioned numerous beneficiaries including "his daughter Isabella, the wife of William Cowans." [1]

[1] This spelling is unusual, the more general form being Cowan. In the current London Directory it appears only once, and that is in connection with Messrs. Cowans, Sheldon and Company, the firm afterwards founded by his son.

Miss Greenwood was the sister of the Reverend Robert Greenwood, Vicar of Blyth, Cramlington and Lambley in Northumberland (he was a pluralist), and since he was the great-uncle of the subject of this biography a few facts about him will be of interest. He married Margaret Umfreville, sister of Captain John Brand Umfreville, R.N., the last male lineal descendant of the ancient and noble house of Umfreville, Earls of Angus and Barons of Prudhoe.[1] He died in 1859 and is described as having been possessed of unassuming manners, while his kindness of heart and peacefulness of disposition endeared him to all classes and denominations. Though his sister and brother-in-law, Willie Cowans, were living at Bedlington, only a few miles from Blyth, history says nothing of their intercourse. The fact remains that William Cowans, whom we first know of as coachman in the service of Mr. Michael Longridge of the Bedlington Iron Works, was a brother-in-law of the Vicar of Blyth. In those days the social difference between these two would be much greater than now; we are, however, justified in assuming that the social and intellectual position of Mr. Greenwood had a direct effect on the upbringing and education of his sister's son.

We have two sources of information about William Cowans—a grandson, now aged eighty-two, and Mr. R. Charles Longridge, a nephew of his employer, both of whom give vivid little sketches of a personality which evidently made a strong impression on their youthful minds. These gentlemen form most interesting links

[1] The Scottish Earldom of Angus was held by the Umfrevilles from 1242 to 1307, when it was annexed to the Crown of Scotland by Robert Bruce. The Barony of Umfraville or Unfreville, created in 1275, has been dormant since 1436.

with the family, since they are perhaps the only people alive with personal recollection of William Cowans.

The former writes that his grandfather was "not above medium height, of good physique, quick in all his movements, with side whiskers almost touched by a high collar, dressed in swallow-tailed coat, breeches, riding boots and high silk hat, and on rare occasions (in specially cold weather only) a plaid thrown over his shoulder; one of the best judges of horse-flesh in the country—he loved his horses and when in the stables would whip out his white handkerchief and rub their coats to see if they were clean. It was quite evident that in his younger days he had seen much of horses—he knew so much about them. His wife was a slender, trim figure, always very nicely dressed, gentle-mannered, fond of and so kind to bairns."

Mr. Charles Longridge admirably supplements this information:

"Old Willie Cowans, as he was known to me, was coachman to my grandfather for a good many years. He taught my father, Robert Berwick Longridge (born in 1821), and his elder brothers to ride, and he put sixpence 'for luck' into a pocket of my first pair of trousers, made by my grandmother. He was a very trusted friend of my grandfather and grandmother, and when, about 1854, they moved from the house near the Works to Hollymount, at the Bebside end of Bedlington village (where I was born in 1849), Willie remained in his house known as Willow Bridge Farm just across the river from the Works. I think it would be about 1856 or 1857 that I was taken to exhibit my new trousers. My recollection of him is dim, for I was very young, but I would

say that he had a good face without being specially good looking.

"I have no clue as to when he came to my grandfather or where he came from. I think he must have been at Bedlington about 1825, but I am very doubtful if he spent his youth there, for though my grandmother, who died in 1892 aged ninety-six, often spoke of him as an old and trusted friend, she never gave me the impression that she had had the training of him, and I think she would have claimed this if it had been the case. In fact my sister agrees with me in believing that Willie Cowans was a married man when he came to Bedlington, but I cannot recollect my grandmother ever mentioning his wife.

"In a letter dated February 1, 1814, my grandfather tells of his riding home from Blyth (the next village to Bedlington) where he had been to attend a library meeting. On nearing home the snow was so deep that he dismounted, and his mare, giving him the slip, galloped off to her stables. Her arrival scared the household, who turned out in force to search for her rider. Now the coachman would certainly have been one of the first to hear of the mare's arrival, but although my grandfather gives the names of a number of those who turned out to look for him, there is no mention of Willie Cowans, from which I think we may safely infer that he was not at Bedlington in 1814.

"In another letter dated October 7, 1825, my grandfather gives an account of a dinner given to the workpeople and of the reception of the Gordon family who had driven from Morpeth. At that time Mr. Gordon was the head of the Bedlington Iron Company, my grandfather being the Manager. In my grandfather's letter he writes: 'All hands turned out in their working dress—

preceded by Wm. Cowans mounted on Grey Douglas and accompanied by a Band of Music and colours to meet and welcome the venerable Head of the Bedlington Iron Company.' Whatever the date of his arrival, it is evident from this that between 1814 and 1824 Willie Cowans had acquired in my grandfather's household an established position, which he retained for the ensuing thirty years.

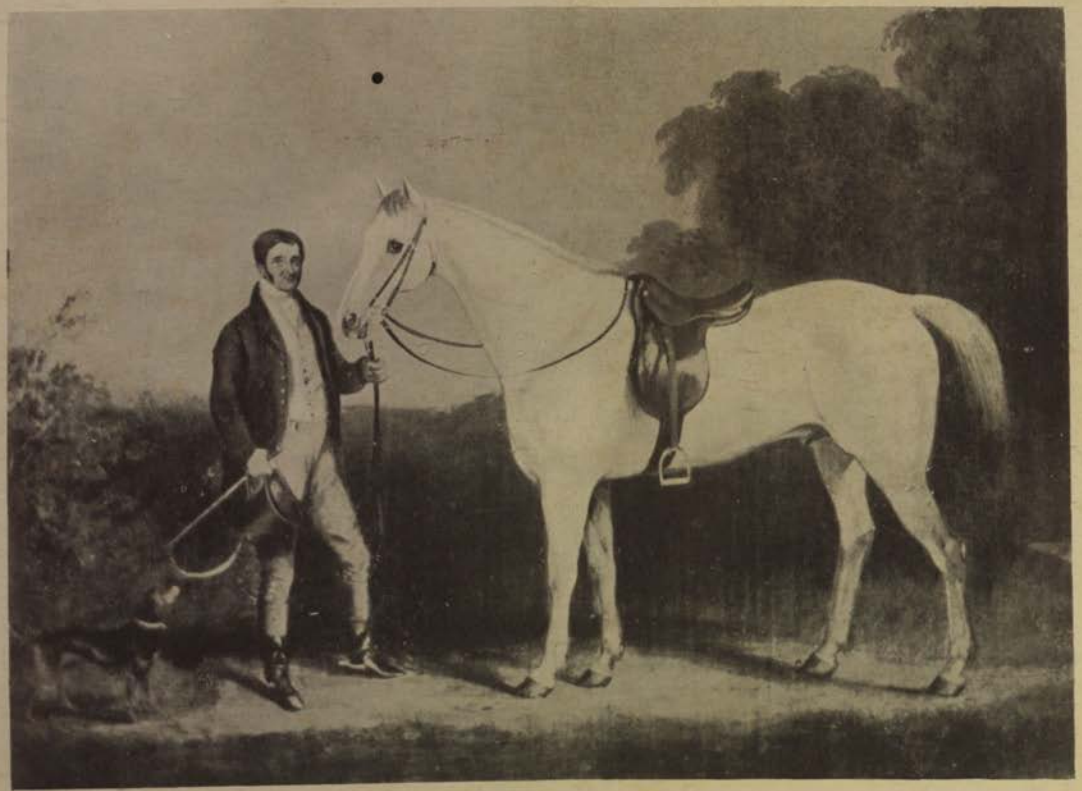
"I have in my room where I am writing an oil painting of Willie in livery standing at the head of a grey horse, Cæsar, on which my father used to hunt, and with a dog, Viper, looking up at him. I don't know the date of the picture, which is an excellent piece of work, but I should judge that Willie was between forty and fifty at the time it was done—possibly not quite so much.

"I never heard of his death, nor have I any recollection of his being at my grandfather's funeral in 1858; indeed the only individual of whom I have any recollection on that occasion was 'Alec' (one of the two village idiots) who was usually prominent at funerals wearing a high scarf or hat band with tails hanging down behind. I wore one myself round my cap, though I was only nine years old."

§ 2

Although Willie Cowans had three children, two sons and a daughter, we are only concerned with the fortunes of his second son, John.

It is the fashion to say of certain men that they were extraordinary—yet there is no other word that would correctly describe the father of the future Quartermaster-General. In this connection it is interesting to quote



William Cowans, Grandfather of Sir John Cowans, with *Cæsar* and *Viper*.

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the opinion of Mr. Thomas Wilson Fish, who is the great-nephew of Mrs. Willie Cowans, his grandmother's sister: "I do not hesitate to say that the grit and ability possessed by John Cowans and his son—Sir John—came from their Greenwood blood, for my grandmother (Greenwood) and mother were both very capable, well-bred women." Mr. Fish's own career and attainments, however, prove that all the Greenwood ability did not pass to the Cowans side of the family.

From Mr. Longridge's account, and from other evidence, there is every reason to believe that John Cowans was born before his father and mother settled at Bedlington, for the year of his birth was 1816. While quite young he began to rise, owing most probably to the favour and friendship of the Longridges, and not the least interesting and significant thing about him was that to the end of his life he retained the close and affectionate friendship of the whole family.

Brought up as he was almost under the shadow of what would then be considered a great industrial enterprise and at a period when mechanical invention was making such astonishing developments, it was natural enough that his thoughts should turn to engineering. Mr. Longridge has the impression that he received some early training in the Bedlington Works, but while still little more than a boy he was apprenticed at Newcastle-on-Tyne to the firm of Robert Stephenson and Company, whose founder (1781-1830) was the inventor of the steam engine; after completing his apprenticeship, Cowans was put in charge of one of the departments in the Works.

Very early his mind and personality seem to have displayed those attractive and arresting qualities that were later so conspicuous in his eldest son, the most

noteworthy being his unusual perception of impending commercial developments. His abilities seem to have won early recognition.

It was while he was at Stephensons' that he met his future partner, Edward Pattison Sheldon, who, having also served his apprenticeship with the firm, was in due course promoted to a position of responsibility. Being of the same age, the young men naturally became close friends, and, while they were still in their twenties, they formed a resolution to strike out and found a business of their own.

Those were the early days of railways, and, as might have been expected from their training at Stephensons', their thoughts turned towards the manufacture of articles required in that branch of engineering.

In the year 1846 they began prospecting for works suitable for their purpose. At that time the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway line was approaching completion (it was opened in the following year), and consequently their attention was directed towards Carlisle as a likely centre. They accordingly visited the city together, but were not successful in finding premises suitable for their purpose. Hearing, however, that there was a small place likely to be vacated at Woodbank, a hamlet near Upperby, about two miles south of the city, they went to inspect it in the hope that it might meet their requirements.

Woodbank proved to be an ideal place for their purpose. Workshops on a small scale already existed, but the proprietor had not found operations successful and wished to give them up. The two friends, full of youthful enthusiasm and anxious to begin, were not to be daunted by another's failure. It seemed to them that

the advantages of the site were such that they might lead to success, and they decided to take the risk.

The Works were close to the River Petteril, a small stream that flows into the Eden at Carlisle, and water-power was thus available for driving a tilt-hammer suitable for forging purposes. In addition, the new railway line ran close by, giving facilities for a siding into the Works; and, without delay, an agreement was entered into with the outgoing tenant, whose brother, Mr. William Bouch, then Chief Engineer of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, joined them as a sleeping partner.

It was thus that the now well-known engineering firm of Cowans, Sheldon and Company had its beginning. In those days the locality of Woodbank was more rural and picturesque than it is now, and it was entirely detached from city life. In addition to the Works, the firm leased a small farm which they cultivated, and employers and employed associated on terms altogether different from those of the present day. The two active partners were gifted men of strong character with the close all-round knowledge of their work that was obtainable at that time. They scorned delights and lived laborious days, and although at first orders came in slowly, shrewdness, industry and persistence found their reward.

As will be seen from his portrait, John Cowans was strikingly handsome. He was about six feet in height, and carried himself with a soldierly bearing. Ruddy of countenance, with flaxen hair and bright blue eyes, he was of a cheery nature, alike fitted to win or to command, as needs required.

His optimism being balanced by the more cautious nature of his partner, the two were ideally matched, and,

what is perhaps somewhat rare in partnerships, their close friendship remained unbroken to the end.

Too close application to business began to affect Mr. Sheldon's eyesight early in the 'fifties, and he gradually became totally blind, but his determination was such that he would not allow this calamity to close his business career. While continuing to act advisorily in practical matters, he undertook the control of the financial and business side of the firm, writing drafts of important letters through the use of a noctograph, and generally superintending all commercial details.

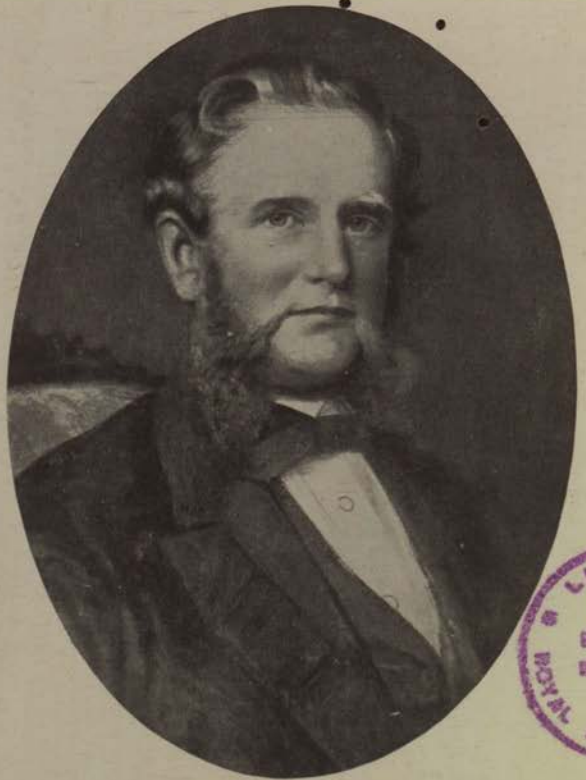
In the year 1857, larger and more convenient premises came into the market at St. Nicholas Works, Carlisle. These were purchased by Cowans, Sheldon and Company, who took possession of them at the beginning of 1858, when the late Mr. George Dove joined the firm. For a few years the works at Woodbank and St. Nicholas ran side by side, the former being principally engaged in making forgings, wheels for railway engines and carriages, points and crossings, and other railway material.

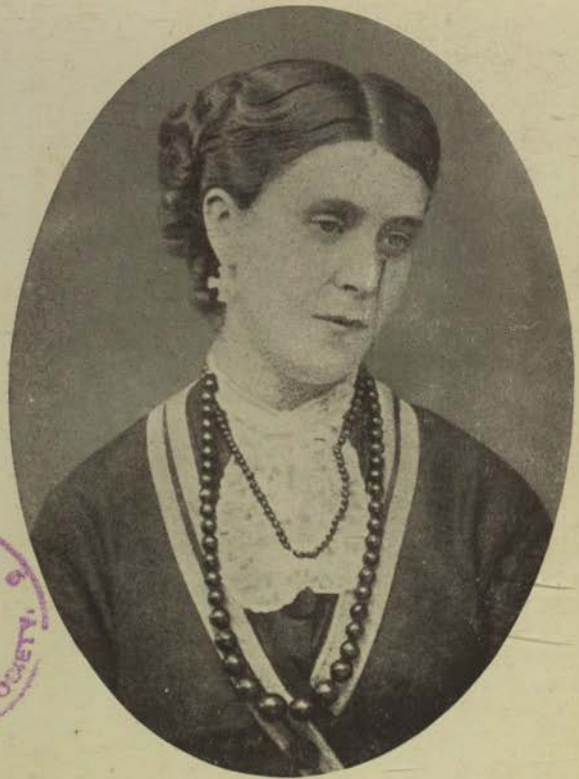
About 1854, John Cowans, E. P. Sheldon and William Bouch had become financially interested in the Darlington Forge Company, and, soon after their entering upon the St. Nicholas Works, the whole of the forge side of the Woodbank business was transferred to Darlington.

Early in the 'sixties, the late Mr. William Putnam became manager at Darlington, and on his death he was succeeded by his son, now Sir Thomas Putnam, who has since then been Managing Director.

The Darlington Forge Company has now grown to be one of the largest and best equipped steel works in the country.

The St. Nicholas Works, at Carlisle, have throughout





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MR. AND MRS. JOHN COWANS.
Father and Mother of Sir John.

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been occupied in general engineering, principally in articles connected with railways and docks. The firm was the first to make engine turn-tables on the balance-on-centre principle, which enabled the heaviest type of locomotive to be readily turned by one man, an operation that had previously been done by means of a geared winch.

The great speciality of the firm, however, and the one by which its name has become known throughout the world, is the building of cranes. At first, these were operated only by hand, but early in the 'sixties the firm was among the first to introduce cranes, of both fixed and travelling types, worked by steam power. Later, hydraulic and pneumatic cranes were made, and more recently electricity has largely superseded these.

At first the cranes were comparatively primitive in design, and of small power, but, as the years passed, improvements were made and sizes increased, until now the most colossal cranes in the world are those made by Cowans, Sheldon and Company. The most striking of these, and by far the most powerful of its type, is the huge floating crane completed during 1923 for Japan. This crane, which is built upon a ship two hundred and seventy-five feet long, has a working capacity of three hundred and fifty tons at a radius of a hundred feet, the height from the water level to the top of the jib being two hundred and forty-five feet, exactly a hundred feet higher than the Nelson Column.

§ 3

If John Cowans did not live to see the ultimate success of his firm, he at least had the satisfaction of seeing it rise from small beginnings to assured prosperity.

By the time his closer connection with the Darlington Forge Company took place he was well to do, and in the following year, 1861, he married Jeannie, the elder of the two daughters of Samuel Steven of St. John, New Brunswick, who was of Scottish extraction, being the third and youngest son of James Steven of Girvan, Ayrshire. Upon his death his widow migrated to St. John, and, being apparently quite comfortably off, bought two properties there, one known as Netherby Hall and the other as Cedar Bank. Like her husband, Mrs. Samuel Steven died young, their elder daughter Jeannie being at the time only eleven and the younger ten.

The orphans returned to England and lived with an uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Roper, at Ulverston in Cumberland, until they were married—Jeannie, as we have seen, to John Cowans, and the younger, in 1866, to Aymer Ainslie of Hall Garth, Over Kellet, near Carnforth, Lancashire, some twenty-five miles from Ulverston. Both these ladies are still alive. Mrs. Cowans is a great invalid, but Mrs. Ainslie is one of the youngest, most resilient and charming ladies one could meet, and there can be no doubt that from the Steven family Jack inherited his amazing energy and youthfulness, as he inherited his organising and business capacity from his brilliant father.

Miss Jeannie Steven would often stay at the house of the Vicar of Upperby, the Reverend William Cockett, M.A., whose ward she was, and John Cowans most probably first met her there. At the time of their marriage Mr. Charles Longridge was living in Manchester with his father and his uncle, William Smith Longridge. He recollects that his uncle was in close touch with John Cowans (the two were about the same age), who occasionally had him to stay when he visited Manchester, and

was in fact his best man when he married. All this shows how deep was the regard in which the members of the Longridge family held their old servant's son all his life, and how they extended this regard to warm friendship.

Mr. Longridge has allowed us to reproduce the following letter in which Mr. William Longridge gives his mother an account of John Cowans's wedding:

Salford Rolling Mills,
Manchester.
June 6, 1861.

MY DEAR MOTHER,

I have received your letter of the 4th inst. The wedding went off with the greatest éclat—what else could be expected, when so experienced a personage was the best man? The bride is a fine handsome figure, lady-like, good-looking, but not what can be called pretty, a very good musician and sings charmingly, of course. She is much on Adèle's[1] style of dimensions, and as far as I had an opportunity of judging, exceedingly good-tempered and amiable; so John Cowans has made a very good choice, the connection being very good. The bride is one of two daughters (orphans) sent home from Canada to their uncle and aunt, a Mr. and Mrs. Roper, without the slightest notice, further than they had been shipped off and would arrive in England by a certain steamer in Liverpool. Mr. and Mrs. R. had an only son but no daughters, and received the orphans about nine years ago, and had they been their own they could not have been more attached to them.

They have some fortune of their own but I did not learn what. I arrived at Newland House on Monday and found them such homely kind people, that before I was

[1] Mr. Longridge cannot identify this lady.

in the house half an hour I was as much at home as if I had known them for years. There were only two bridesmaids, the sister under my wing, and an aunt, a single young lady of a certain age, under charge of a W. Morgan, a Welsh iron master and intended husband of the bride's sister. The dresses were very neat; but I must defer further descriptions till we meet. Of course we had to go to church. The first carriage taking Mrs. Roper, the bridegroom and the clergyman and his wife,[1] who had come from John's own parish to marry them, and it was at his house the first introduction took place; then followed carriage No. 2 with bridesmaids, best and second man. Carriage No. 3 the uncle and bride.

The ceremony over we returned, cut the cake and drank iced cup to the happy couple (had no grand breakfast), who set out almost at once per train to London. We then partook of a very comfortable lunch and set out for a very pleasant drive to Coniston, which agreeably passed the time till it was time to dress for dinner, which was given at Furness Abbey and served in sumptuous and magnificent style to a party of thirty. The usual amount of speechifying for such occasions, tea, coffee, and music with the ladies. We broke up about 10.30 o'clock and reached Newlands about midnight. Taking my farewell of the bridesmaids, receiving showers of compliments from all sides on the manner I had acquitted myself of the duties of best man, I got to bed at the Lion Inn, Ulverston, about two o'clock in the morning, and was up again at five to get the first train to Manchester. So endeth the merriest wedding party I have yet been at.

Yours affec.,

W. S. LONGRIDGE.

[1] Mr. and Mrs. Cockett.

Photo by] *[George Henry Hill, Carlisle.*

WOODBANK, NEAR CARLISLE.
Birthplace of Sir John Cowans.

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Although the letter does not say so definitely, we know that Newland House was situated near Ulverston, so that in all probability the marriage took place in the Parish Church.

Mr. and Mrs. John Cowans had three sons, John Steven, William Greenwood, and Ernest Arnold. All three were born at Woodbank. For the photograph of their birthplace we are indebted to Mr. George Henry Hill of Carlisle, who was kind enough to take it specially for the purpose of this book. The general features of the buildings are the same as they were in 1862. For some time they have been occupied as a farm-house and additional farm buildings have been made. Mr. James Walter Brown, who became associated with Cowans, Sheldon and Company as early as 1870 and is still Secretary and Director of the Company, speaks of his recollecting Jack about that time as a small boy with blue eyes and curly flaxen hair who used to come down to the Works in a phæton with his mother and pick up Mr. Cowans, all three driving out to Woodbank together.

Two other glimpses of his boyhood are worth recalling. We find him at the age of six writing in a round, boyish hand to his "dear Cousin Fish," and at the age of ten he sends him a copy of *Waterloo: A Story of the Hundred Days*, inscribed in his mother's writing "Thomas Wilson Fish—a Christmas souvenir from his cousins John Steven and William Greenwood Cowans."

In 1872, the term of the partnership deed having expired, the firm of Cowans, Sheldon and Company was formed into a private limited liability concern; and as Mr. Cowans's health had begun to fail, he resigned his active duties, but remained on the Board.

At Cranford, in Middlesex, he bought from the Dowager

Lady Fitzhardinge a country house known as Hartlands, which was subsequently inherited and sold by his eldest son.

The family went to live at Hartlands, but Mr. Cowans enjoyed his retirement only for a brief period, as he died in the following May (1873) at the age of fifty-six. His will was proved under £60,000 personalty, and Hartlands was worth about £6,000. His fortune was accumulated not only from the profits of the two firms in which he was so prominent a partner, but from shrewd investments elsewhere. This financial success goes to prove his grasp of business matters, for the sums named meant a great deal more fifty years ago than they do now.

The Bedlington Iron Works have, of course, long since disappeared, but it is interesting and perhaps not unprofitable to reflect that their very existence may be said to have in a measure influenced history. It might so easily have happened that Willie Cowans should have settled on the land. In that case John Cowans would have grown up in the less progressive atmosphere of rural England; his thoughts would more likely have turned to agriculture than to industry. That he would have made a place for himself we can hardly doubt, for qualities such as his make their way as surely and as inevitably as a crocus breaks earth in spring; he would have got on, but had he become, say, a farmer, it is unlikely that he would have reached a position that would have enabled him to send his son Jack to Sandhurst.

As it was, the Works at Bedlington with which Willie Cowans became associated early in life proved his son's inspiration. His career was one of steady and honourable advancement, and it was thanks to the fortune brought him by his clear-sightedness in turning to

engineering at a time of coming industrial expansion that his son became a soldier, and the greatest Quartermaster-General in English history.

§ 4

Mrs. John Cowans was always a great traveller. After her husband's death she spent much of her time abroad, principally in Rome. From her letters we know that she was received by His Holiness Pope Pius IX. as early as 1868, and later she joined the Roman Catholic Church.

Those who believe in heredity may consider it noteworthy that Mrs. Cowans's great-grandmother, Mrs. McClymont, was an Italian and a Roman Catholic. Her second son William was also attracted by Italy, where he studied painting. He seems to have been artistic and somewhat highly strung. Eventually he too entered the Roman Catholic Church.

These facts taken together are more than accidental, and must be considered when we come to the last days in Mentone, when her eldest son followed his mother's example and that of his brother in adopting the faith of an Italian ancestress.

Whatever the ultimate effect of the action of Mrs. Cowans and her sojourn in Rome may have had on her son, its immediate consequences were vitally important, and without any doubt had a great bearing on the development of his character and the shaping of his whole future life.

When his father died in 1873 Jack was just eleven, on the verge of adolescence, the most critical period in a boy's life. It is impossible to avoid speculating as to

what life had brought to him in those earliest and most impressionable years.

A dim memory of a modest, comfortable home two miles outside the ancient Border city with its old solemn cathedral. Daily attendance at a small private school; visits to the Works, which were, moreover, to last and become a part of the industrial history of England. An upbringing in an atmosphere of dawning railway development by which the boy undoubtedly subconsciously acquired that uncanny knowledge of the principles and possibilities of transport which were to be the very foundations of his professional success. Muted memories of a mother-love that, itself having only the faintest memories of a parent's care, perhaps never realised how little it was giving. That old Italian strain, that call of the South and of the imperious mysticism of the Roman Faith appears to have been so great and so potent that it may even have made home and motherhood itself seem small.

Then the quick brain, the strong, unbelievably strong constitution, the immense capacity for work and the genius for organisation, which were the gifts of the father; the deep need of love which, in those early years following his father's death, must have often gone unsatisfied—how life was to take these things and shape them into a great weapon to serve England in her hour of need.

All through the sunny, life-filled, work-filled years the paternal qualities dominated the son: yet, the most subtle being ever the most strong, it was the mother's influence that stood nearest to him and helped him most when with his unconquerable smile he came to face the end.

John Steven Cowans and his brother, William Greenwood Cowans.

John Steven Cowans at the age of five.

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§ 5

Aymer Ainslie, whom, as will be remembered, Mrs. Cowans's only sister married in 1866, was the youngest son of the Reverend Gilbert Ainslie, D.D., Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge. He rented Hall Garth, the family home, from his elder brother, and acted as guardian to the two boys, Jack and Ernest. In fact, after their father's death, Hall Garth became their home, and both Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie looked upon them as they did upon their own son. They could hardly have come under a more delightful and beneficial influence. In addition to qualities already mentioned, Mrs. Ainslie is essentially a *grande dame*; she loved her nephew Jack; he returned her affection and, to the end of his life, was full of tender devotion and courteous consideration for her.

Mr. Ainslie was of a type now unfortunately disappearing. Cultivated and well-read, a fine sportsman, a perfect country gentleman, everyone's friend and friend to everyone. He was genial, kindly, sweet-tempered and consistently cheery. He held the Racquets Championship for Cambridge University, Singles for 1860-61 and the Doubles for 1860-63. Towards his own son he was more brother than parent, and his nephew Jack shared in this happy intimacy. He was a broad-minded churchman of the least complex type, and his influence would have tended to weaken any latent inclination towards ritualism or Roman Catholicism. Possessing a strong sense of duty and rectitude, and a ready sympathy with all who were in trouble, he was a kind husband and a staunch friend.

Jack and his youngest brother Ernest were sent to Dr. Burney's famous Academy at Gosport. It was an

old-established school, having been handed down from father to son in the Burney family for several generations, and was intended primarily as a preparatory school for the Navy. At one time nearly half the successful candidates for Naval cadetships were "Burney boys." A good many pupils, however, remained at the school until they were about eighteen or until they passed into the Army, Cooper's Hill, and elsewhere. It was a very old-fashioned school, with practically none of the luxuries which are now looked upon as necessaries. The food supplied was of the very plainest description, but the sons of wealthy parents were allowed extras. In spite of the very simple fare which most of the boys had, however, the physique and general health was extremely good, and the school had a great reputation at games, the first football fifteen being of a high standard.

The school also had barges with from ten to fourteen oars. Some of these were said to have been presented by Royal princes. From very early in the summer until the end of autumn the boys used to row to a bathing-place at the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour, more or less racing each way.

A contemporary of the brothers at the Academy remembers Jack "as one of the cheeriest of school fellows, always full of fun and chaffing everyone in a good-natured sort of way. He was already extremely popular. There was no affectation about him. He was simply bubbling over with fun and high spirits. He was well up to the average, or rather above it, in games, and was always rather tall and well-developed for his age."

The idea in sending Jack to the Academy was that he should enter the Navy. Before he was fourteen he went up for his examination but failed. This failure prevented

him from going to Eton or Harrow as he might otherwise have done, and he was sent abroad with a tutor for an extended tour on the Continent. He spent some time travelling in France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland, and on his return went back to Dr. Burney to be prepared for Sandhurst, which he entered in 1878.

Dr. Burney, who was no mean judge, in writing to Mr. Ainslie, expressed his high opinion of Jack's abilities and his own strong personal regard for him. Even in those days the boy could win both admiration and love from his official superiors.

It is characteristic of him that on his first parade at Sandhurst his sense of humour got the better of him; tradition has it that he was put under arrest for laughing at the feet of an officer, an old ranker, who suffered from remarkable bunions. A year later he was serving as an under-officer in a company of gentlemen cadets, which means that he was one of ten picked out of a hundred and fifty. He also gained notoriety by throwing another under-officer into the lake. He passed out with distinction at the end of 1880.

At Sandhurst he was popular and made many friends, his greatest being "Johnny" Hardinge (Captain the Honourable Arthur Hardinge), younger brother of Viscount Hardinge,[1] and of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst, K.G.; young Hardinge afterwards entered the Royal Scots Fusiliers. At Sandhurst Jack first displayed that amazing capacity for both work and play which was always one of his leading characteristics. When he entered he was almost at the bottom of the list and when he left almost at the top. A sudden visit might find him in his study immersed in work. He would drop it instantly,

[1] Henry Charles, third Viscount Hardinge, C.B., died April 30, 1924.

leave it completely behind, go out and enjoy himself with an abandon given to few. Perhaps a fair number of boys can do this, but it is one of those priceless gifts mostly lost with the passing years. With J. S. C. it grew and strengthened.

§ 6

On leaving Sandhurst Cowans desired to join a cavalry regiment, and it was perhaps as well that he did not succeed. Although a life-long lover of horses and fond of racing, he was a poor horseman. In spite of a tall, lithe, athletic figure, he never looked his best when mounted; to inexpert observation he seemed very imposing when he had the honour of leading the procession at King Edward's Coronation in 1902, but it must have been one of the most trying experiences of his life. However, as it earned him the Royal Victorian Order, no doubt he felt consoled.

He volunteered for service in the Zulu War with the 60th Rifles, but this request was refused. Owing, however, to the kindness of Field-Marshal His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, K.G., the Colonel-in-Chief, he received a nomination for a commission in the Rifle Brigade, and, in company with his brother officer, C. G. Fortescue, (Brigadier-General the Honourable C. G. Fortescue, C.B.), sailed for India in H.M.S. *Jumna* in March, 1881.

Had he succeeded in entering the Navy or had he seen active service in the Zulu War his whole life might have been different. A curious irony of fate pursued him throughout his Army career—he never saw a shot fired on active service. Repeatedly he attempted to see service in the field and always failed. During the earlier

Hartlands, Cranford, Middlesex.

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years one must assume by an adverse fate: later, because he was too useful to be spared.

His own strong wish was to go to Zululand. Had he done so he might have fallen there with the Prince Imperial and remained unknown. The fate, accident or whim which prevented him going had momentous consequences for himself and for the British Army and Empire.

CHAPTER II

1881—1897

Life at Poona—A.D.C. to General Sir John Ross—Loses too much money racing—Court-martials and sentences himself never to gamble beyond his means—Returns to Rifle Brigade Depôt—Marries—Applies to go on Active Service in Burma—Is refused—Death of brother, William—Posted to Second Battalion—Regimental life at Woolwich—Visit of Prince William of Prussia—Decides to cram for Staff College—His inherited perception of opportunity—Passes in by narrow margin—Opinions of contemporaries—Passes out with distinction—Staff Appointment at War Office under Sir Coleridge Grove—Work in the Mobilisation Section—Famous telegram to Sir Henry Wilson—Appointed Brigade Major to Second Infantry Brigade—Two years at Aldershot—Method of combining work and play—Described as an "ideal Staff Officer"—Other tributes—The promise of the future.

One eye-witness is better than ten who speak from hearsay. Hearers can only tell what they heard. Those who see know the fact positively.
—PLAUTUS.

THE First Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, then in India, with Colonel F. H. A. Seymour in command, was divided into two wings, one at Poona and one at Ahmednagar. The Adjutant was Captain Metcalfe (afterwards Major-General C. T. E. Metcalfe, C.B.). Cowans was posted to Poona, and there had his first taste of how delightful life could be in India in a crack regiment if one had good health, good spirits, an attractive personality and some

money. He joined C Company, which was then commanded by Captain C. V. Eccles, a well-known cricketer of the day, famous throughout the Service for his lobs. Very soon after his arrival, however, he became acting aide-de-camp to General Sir John Ross, who assumed command of the Poona Division of the Bombay Army on June 9, 1881. Cowans's posting never seems to have been officially confirmed, and probably he only occupied the post temporarily until Major J. D. Mansel of the Rifle Brigade assumed duty, which he did in January, 1882. J. S. C.'s social gifts would have made him an ideal aide-de-camp, and his duties would not only mean a very pleasant time, but would bring him early in his career into close contact with important people who would be of much use to him later.

Years afterwards he himself told a woman friend that during this period he spent far too much money on racing, got badly into debt and did no work. So serious did the situation become that he court-martialled and sentenced himself. It was a life sentence, and the order was that he was never again to gamble beyond what he could afford, and that he was to start and work really hard. Although he was a keen race-goer all his life, he kept this resolve, and he said laughingly that his early racing losses were really the foundation of his serious career. His resolve to work hard did not, however, materialise until some years later. Speaking of him at this time, a brother officer writes :

" My first recollection of the late General Sir John Cowans is as ' under officer ' at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, out of which he passed near the head of the list and was gazetted to the Rifle Brigade with six others on January 22, 1881. When I joined the First Battalion in

April of that year, Jack Cowans was a subaltern in C Company, then commanded by Captain C. V. Eccles, shortly to be succeeded by Captain F. Raikes. Both those officers were well-known cricketers, and it is chiefly in connection with cricket that I remember Cowans, who used to play for Poona. In Company and Battalion matches he and Frank Raikes, bowling at opposite ends, were frequently a deadly combination. He passed the Lower Standard Hindustani examination very soon, but I don't remember if he also passed the Higher."

He did, in fact, pass the Higher Standard examination within twelve months of his arrival in India—excellent time, for a stiff paper was always set, and when he went to the Staff College nine years later he took Hindustani as one of his subjects, although, as he said, he had forgotten most of what he knew by then.

During the first period he was in India he took life and work on the whole very light-heartedly and is chiefly remembered because of his association with sport, particularly cricket, and his keen interest in regimental entertainments. Even in those days his mere presence always created, as a brother officer of the period puts it, 'a certain liveliness.'

Many amusing stories are told of him, and a characteristic one deserves rescuing from oblivion. Soon after his arrival at Poona, owing to the unexpected absence of all the other officers of his company, he found himself at a ceremonial parade before the General Officer Commanding, the Honourable Sir Arthur Hardinge,[1] leading his men past the saluting base. Quite

[1] General the Honourable Sir Arthur Hardinge, K.C.B., Commander-in-Chief, Bombay Army, 1881-85; died 1892. Son of 1st Viscount Hardinge of Lahore and King's Newton.

The Reverend Robert Greenwood, Great-uncle of Sir John Cowans.

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inexperienced, he was doing so without lowering his sword, when his Company-Sergeant-Major hissed out at him from the rear, "Salute, Mr. Cowans, salute!" Whereupon he half turned to his men and called out, "General Salute, Present Arms!" The result, of course, was chaos.

While on leave in the hills he, together with some other young officers, got into trouble for ragging, in the early hours of the morning, the Commanding Officer of a native Indian Regiment. He found himself sent back to his Battalion under arrest; but the affair blew over. Shortly afterwards, since he was suffering a good deal from the climate, which affected his liver, he went home on sick leave, returning to the Rifle Brigade Depôt towards the end of 1883.

On February 14, 1884, Cowans was married at the Parish Church, Grange-over-Sands, Lancashire, by the Reverend Henry White, M.A., of the Chapel Royal, Savoy, Chaplain-in-Ordinary to Queen Victoria, to Eva Mary, eldest daughter of the Reverend John Edmund Coulson, M.A., of Christ Church, Oxford, and Vicar of Long Preston, Yorkshire. The marriage did not result in children.

Two years later he was still at the Depôt, and the following description of him from Brigadier-General H. R. Mends, C.B., is of interest, showing him as a typical young officer of the day:

"In the spring of 1886 I went to the Rifle Depôt as Major and found Jack Cowans there, he being then Lieutenant and married. He was a very cheery, bright young officer, leading a very happy life, and, service at the Depôt not being then very arduous, he as well as others had a very pleasant easy time with a good deal of hunting and shooting, and cricket in the summer. I did not then think he showed any great military ardour

or genius, but like everyone else was attracted by his charming personality, brightness and keen sense of humour."

§ 2

About this time that most brilliant of men and distinguished of Viceroys, Lord Dufferin,[1] was engaged in the task which added Burma to the British Empire and earned for himself a Marquisate with the courtesy title of Earl of Ava, after the native Burmese kingdom of that name, for his eldest son.

On November 14, 1885, a British force consisting of a Naval Brigade some five hundred strong, and a military force of about three thousand British and six thousand native soldiers with guns, machine-guns and the necessary transport, assembled at Thyetmo under command of General Prendergast (afterwards General Sir Harry North Prendergast, V.C., K.C.B.); Colonel White (afterwards Field-Marshal Sir George White, V.C., G.C.B.), and Colonel Norman (Major-General L. C. V. Norman, C.B.) acting as Brigadiers.

They advanced rapidly up-country and routed the Burmese army at Menhla on November 17, at a cost of one officer and three men killed, and five officers and twenty-four men wounded. Mandalay was occupied and King Theebaw taken prisoner.

This, however, did not end the campaign, which developed into guerilla warfare that lasted another eighteen months. The First Battalion of the Rifle Brigade was sent to reinforce the expedition, and reached Burma in October, 1886, under the command of Colonel

[1] Frederick, first Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, K.P., died in 1902.

Deedes (Major-General W. H. Deedes, D.S.O.), remaining in the country for just over two years, although the campaign ended officially, for purposes of the medal, on April 30, 1887. It was during this period that Field-Marshal Sir Henry Hughes Wilson, Bt., G.C.B., who was then a subaltern, received from the spike of a bamboo paling an eye-wound, the mark of which, as all who knew him will remember, he carried all his life.

When Cowans learnt that the First Battalion was going on active service, he naturally endeavoured to rejoin. After several refusals he was allowed to do so, but his persistent ill-luck pursued him and he did not reach India in time. Had he succeeded he would have seen no real fighting and not much soldiering, and anyhow would not have taken part in General Prendergast's rapid assembly of his forces, quick march to Mandalay, defeat of Theebaw, and almost immediate occupation of Bhamo on the Chinese frontier which were, in their degree, fine pieces of work. He would, however, have secured the Burma Medal and thus have had the satisfaction of wearing at least one war decoration.

In 1886 his second brother, William, died in Italy, but, apart from its tragic suddenness, this event could not have had much effect on the elder brother because they hardly knew each other.

In May, 1887, Cowans was posted to the Second Battalion at Woolwich, and while he was with it the Battalion underwent several changes in its command. Colonel C. G. Slade was succeeded in August by Colonel Ernest H. Buller, who was killed by a train at Woolwich in 1888; Colonel Lucius Cary was in command until September 1889, when he was in turn succeeded by Colonel L. V. Swaine (General Sir Leopold Swaine, K.C.B.).

Cowans was in H Company, which was commanded by the Honourable Montagu Curzon (uncle of the present Earl Howe); a brother subaltern was the Honourable Charles Winn,[1] who was affectionately known as 'Squash.' Curzon was six foot four in height, Cowans just over six foot, and Winn was five foot, so that H Company's officers appeared a strangely assorted trio on parade.

When Cowans joined the Second Battalion, Captain George Cockburn (Brigadier-General George Cockburn, C.B.E.) was Adjutant; among his other contemporaries, then captains and subalterns, were Captain Leonard Arthur (brother of Sir George Arthur), who entered the Consular Service and died from illness contracted on the Gold Coast in 1902; Brigadier-General the Honourable Sir Henry Yarde-Buller, K.B.E.; Major-General Sir Victor Couper, K.C.B., who commanded the Fourteenth Division in the European War; Colonel the Honourable Wenman Coke; Colonel Viscount Hardinge; Captain Frederick E. Lawrence, a fine horseman and Grand National rider, who was killed in a skirmish at Mgobami in East Africa in 1895; Major-General Sir Ronald Lane, K.C.B.; Brigadier-General the Earl of Lucan, K.B.E.; General the Right Honourable Sir Neville Lyttelton, G.C.B., Governor of Chelsea Hospital; Brigadier-General L. L. Nicol, C.B.; Colonel Charles à Court Repington, the distinguished military historian; Major-General Sir Reginald Byng Stephens, K.C.B., late Commandant of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst; Major-General G. H. Thesiger, C.B., killed in 1915 while commanding the Ninth Division in France, and Sir Henry Wilson.

[1] Killed in 1898 while playing polo in India.

Hall Garth, Over Kellett, Lancashire.

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It was among such men as these that J. S. C. found himself in his new surroundings, and the change from India to a home Battalion was an excellent thing for him in many ways.

With the First Battalion, where work and play in those days were not of such a high standard as at home, he had things very much his own way; in the Second Battalion he found men as good at both as he was; he found, for instance, that he could not beat everyone in the Mess at billiards, which was then one of his favourite amusements.

He was the only married subaltern in the Battalion; light-hearted, moderately well off, and able to indulge his tastes, which were then directed towards racing and hunting. He worked hard as a bowler in the Battalion cricket team and, as always, took a great interest in the men's games. It was a period when sports were becoming an increasingly important part of the soldier's life, and the Army Football Cup Competition was initiated by some of the officers of the Second Battalion of the Rifle Brigade and those of the Scots Guards.

The Cup was presented by the late Colonel Harry McCalmont of the Scots Guards and Captain Freddie Lawrence of the Rifle Brigade. In the first match between the two regiments Cowans played for his regiment.

The officers spent a great deal of money in organising the matches that followed, even going to the length of buying a brake to take the teams out. Boxing was also very popular among the London and Birmingham men, of whom the bulk of the regiment consisted. Cowans helped Captain Lawrence, who was his close personal friend, in organising concerts and competitions.

Besides Captain Lawrence, he soon won for himself many other friends, among them General Cockburn, with whom he formed a close personal friendship which lasted until his death. General Cockburn writes:

"In the Billiard Room of the Naval and Military Club two cue-cases hung side by side for many years. J. S. C. owned one and I the other. These cases made each other's acquaintance at Woolwich when we served together for the first time, though we had known each other previous to this period.

"When we were at Woolwich I was Adjutant of the Battalion, and, as such, had every opportunity of gaining a knowledge of J. S. C.'s value as an officer, though he was only a subaltern in a Company—there were eight Companies to a Battalion in those days. It did not take me long to discover that he could do all that was required of him with expedition and facility, and with a splendid lot of exceptionally good officers to live and work with, he began to take his profession seriously for perhaps the first time—for soldiering in India and at the Rifle Depôt was not then extraordinarily fatiguing.

"Racing had a certain fascination for him, but I don't think he was ever a very heavy better and certainly never did himself any harm by it. He was most gracious, and if he was apt to be a little careless about money matters, he was never so to the detriment of others. It was then that I got to know him well and came to appreciate his brain power and resource. He enjoyed his life and entered into all games and sports; he could always see the comic side of things and kept up his spirits in a marvellous way under all sorts of circumstances.

"We were a very happy family, and Jack found himself thrown among men of his own age or a year or two

older, who could hold their own in any game or sport, so there was plenty of competition. At cricket he was a fair bowler and in other departments of the game he always did his level best, and did it in a light-hearted, cheerful way which gave much encouragement to others and helped his side enormously. At racquets, lawn tennis or billiards he always played up hard, and though not the best of us at any of these games, it was always a pleasure to play with him on account of the zest he put into everything he did. He was a bright and cheery comrade, ever ready to do what he could for others; moreover, he never made difficulties. I think perhaps that was one of the great causes of his subsequent success."

All his life Cowans loved a good story, and the following, one of his favourites, dates from his time at Woolwich :

One day an Irish Sergeant was drilling a number of recruits and their ideas of marching in line were altogether original. He soon became utterly disgusted at their irregularity and stupidity, and Cowans heard him say, " Halt ! Now just come over here and look at yourselves ! It's a fine straight line you're keeping, isn't it ? "

In common with the Adjutant, the whole Battalion soon discovered that Cowans was a very capable young man and able to do all that he was required to do, not only easily but in an exceedingly satisfactory fashion.

He was very popular with both officers and men and was held in high esteem in the Sergeants' Mess. There is an old Army saying that if an officer is liked off parade he is always liked on parade, and Cowans was an example of this. His word of command was good and as clear as a bell and he was quick to grasp an order. His first thoughts were always of the men and, although he was

inclined to leniency in the matter of discipline, he never failed to see to the comfort of those under him.

It is related that on one occasion when a non-commissioned officer was drilling recruits and J. S. C. was Orderly Officer, he asked a corporal about the price and quality of the beer sold in the detachment canteen. On hearing that there were three qualities—bitter, middle, and mild and bitter (the latter known as 'socks,' costing, in those good pre-War days, three-halfpence a pint), he said, "Oh, I shall try some socks for my lunch." Two days later he remarked to the corporal, "Thank you for telling me about that beer, Corporal. I had some, and it has taken two bottles of brandy to get the taste out of my mouth!"

While at Woolwich he kept a hunter or two and did a little mild racing. There was very little hunting to be had, but the Royal Artillery Draghounds gave those who had horses the opportunity of galloping over a line of country, and J. S. C. took a turn now and then.

On one occasion H. L. Powell (Colonel Henry Lloyd Powell, D.S.O.), then a gunner subaltern, challenged him to a match, owners up, at a Royal Artillery Steeplechase meeting at Plumstead. They came to the post in hunting kit, and two or three fences had been negotiated safely, when Powell's chestnut refused, and J. S. C. went ahead. A moment later Powell got over, caught J. S. C. up, and took the lead at the far side of the course, until his horse refused again. J. S. C.'s brown gelding came on in fine style to the fence just past the grand stand and then, probably owing to the amount of shouting that was going on, it in turn declined to jump. The excitement of the crowd became intense as it watched the unusual spectacle of two riders, one on either side of the course,

trying to coax their mounts to take the obstacles, but, since neither was successful, Captain McMahon (Brigadier-General J. J. McMahon) rushed across to Powell with a hunting-crop in his hand and finally induced the chestnut to clear the jump. After that, no further thought of refusal occurred to it, and it came along, passed the brown gelding by the stand and completed the course, while J. S. C., unassisted by hunting-crop of any brother officer, was still making frantic efforts to get his hunter over the last fence.

In 1887 Prince William of Prussia (the Emperor William II.), visited Woolwich for the purpose of inspecting the Garrison.

The Second Battalion of the Rifle Brigade was turned out in marching order on the parade ground in front of the officers' mess. Having made his inspection, the Prince expressed a wish to see the riflemen skirmish. A great crowd was standing all round, but that did not prevent Colonel Slade from giving the order to skirmish across the cricket field and up the common, and away the men went, scattering the crowd as they moved. The Prince was delighted with the display and asked Colonel Slade if he might take command. He did so, and, in the words of an officer who was present on the parade, handled the Battalion "devilish well!" It is said that he remarked afterwards that the Second Battalion of the Rifle Brigade was the only one he had seen which understood the use of the whistle—for in those days skirmishing in open order by signs, signal and whistle was a comparative innovation.

He was apparently particularly impressed by the way in which Cowans led his men, and when J. S. C. years later was sent to Berlin to attend German manœuvres

with some officers of the Royals (of which Regiment the Emperor was Colonel-in-Chief), the Prince, who had by that time succeeded to the throne, took a great fancy to him, and besides making much of him expressed his admiration with a characteristic economy by decorating him with the Order of the Royal Crown of Prussia.

§ 3

The Battalion moved from Woolwich to Lydd and thence to Dover in 1889, and J. S. C. of course moved with it. D and H Companies formed the detachment quartered at Fort Burgoyne; Captain Wenman Coke was then commanding D Company and had Henry Wilson for his subaltern. He recollects that Cowans and Wilson were, even then, the most remarkable subalterns in the Battalion. They were great friends, and full of life and fun; every night they kept the mess in roars of laughter with their pranks and jokes. He describes them as a "perfect pair" who were "killingly funny together," while General Neville Lyttelton considers that they, together with Colonel à Court Repington, then also a subaltern, were three of the very ablest of his contemporaries in the Rifle Brigade.

About this time J. S. C. and Captain Coke paid a visit to Lady Cowans's family at Long Preston in Yorkshire, and thence went a tour of the Lake District, of which Cowans was very fond; apart from its beauties, it was natural that this should be so, since it was close to his own country. The two had some fishing in the Lakes, and J. S. C. is described as a keen fisherman, but only moderately good.

It was while the Battalion was still at Dover that the

idea of entering the Staff College first occurred to J. S. C. He and his friend Lawrence both set to work with a well-known crammer, who was also a famous historian. While working with him they induced him to visit the Battalion to give a lecture on the subject of the regimental exploits in the Peninsular War, but unfortunately the scheme was not a success, for the lecturer was somewhat addicted to strong waters, and by the time he mounted the platform he was quite incapable of even speaking, so that the men had to be got out of the room as quietly as possible!

Nevertheless he was an efficient crammer, and it was thanks to him that Cowans passed into the Staff College, although by a narrow margin, after only two or three months' work.

In deciding to go to the Staff College Cowans made one of the most momentous and far-reaching decisions of his life. In India, seven years before, as we have seen, he had vowed to work hard and never to gamble beyond what he could afford. But a young man of his temperament was bound to find many temptations to postpone hard work. Then came marriage, accompanied in all probability by a revival of ambition, and the feeling that an income that was sufficient for an unmarried man was now quite another matter. Then he was the only married subaltern in the Battalion, and this would be an additional reason for his desiring to get on in his profession.

Before leaving this period of his regimental service it may be well to quote the opinion of another brother officer as to the impression he made at that time. Sir Ronald Lane writes:

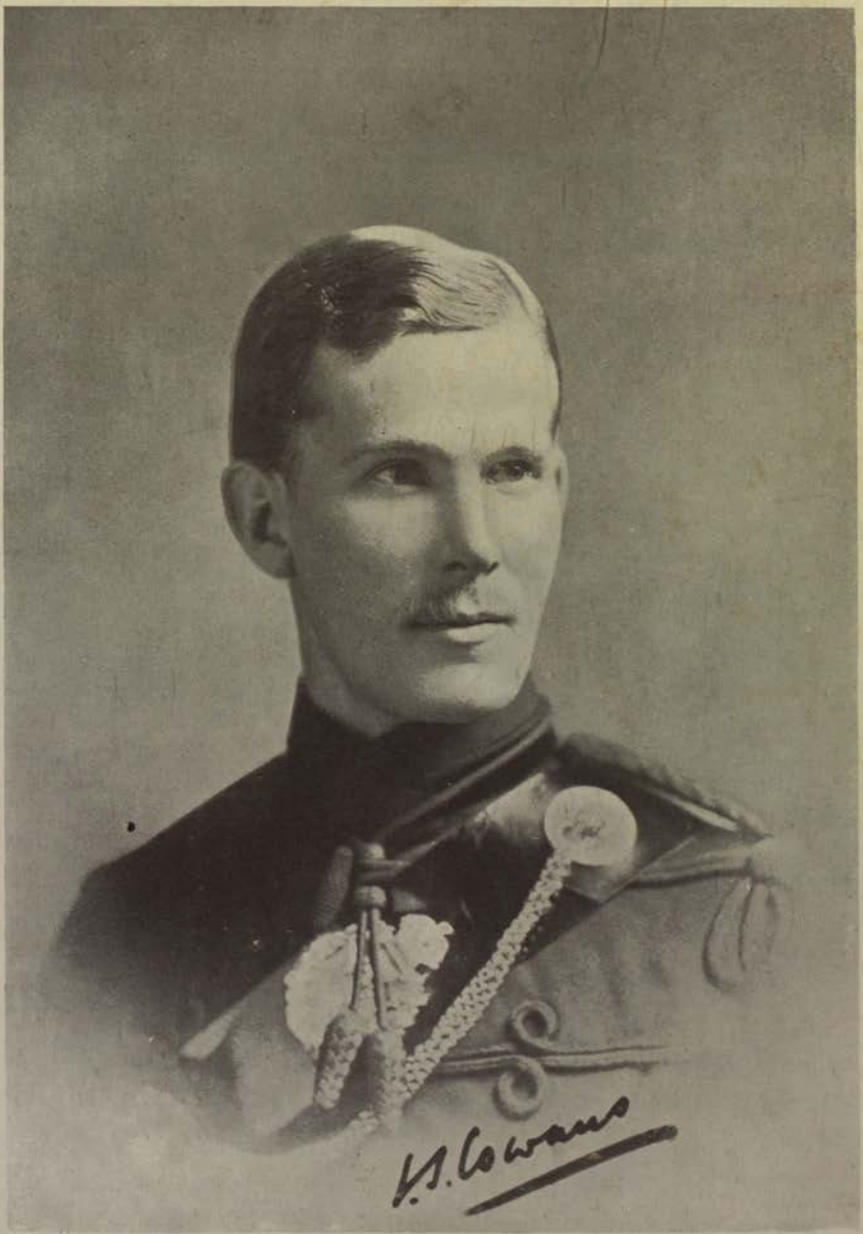
"He was a great personal friend of mine. Universally popular with men and women, perhaps rather

specially so with the latter. In his earlier soldiering days he did not give the impression of one who would later on develop the extraordinary powers of organisation and work which he did to such a remarkable degree."

§ 4

When Cowans entered the Staff College by competitive examination on February 1, 1890, his rank was of course that of a Lieutenant, and, being married, he did not live in the mess.

He found himself amongst a batch of thirty men of whom fifteen afterwards became General officers. They are: Cowans himself, Major-General Sir George Aston, K.C.B., Major-General W. E. Bunbury, C.B., General Sir Francis Davies, K.C.B., Lieutenant-General Sir Spencer Ewart, K.C.B., Brigadier-General R. N. Gamble, C.B., Major-General the Lord Edward Gleichen, K.C.V.O., General Sir Bruce Hamilton, G.C.B., Brigadier-General J. W. Hawkins, Brigadier-General Sir Henry Johnson, Bt., C.B., Major-General the Honourable John Lindley, Major-General Sir Reginald Pinney, K.C.B., Major-General Fitzgerald Wintour, C.B., Major-General Sir Edward Woodward, K.C.M.G., and Major-General Sir George Younghusband, K.C.M.G. The remaining fifteen were Captain D. M. Allen (died in West India), Colonel W. P. Blood, Captain C. F. Cromie, Captain the Honourable Arthur S. Hardinge (thrown from his horse and accidentally killed while riding out of Hyde Park into the road), Captain A. T. P. Hudson (killed in South Africa), Captain H. R. Knight, Colonel H. D. Laffan, C.M.G., Major C. W. Peters, Captain A. J. Richardson, Captain A. R. Stuart, Colonel the Honourable Milo Talbot, C.B.,



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Sir John Cowans as a Subaltern in the Rifle Brigade.

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Captain W. R. Taylor, Colonel Sir Courtenay Vyvyan, Bt., C.B., Major M. B. C. F. Walker (accidentally killed in Egypt) and Major W. F. Walter (killed at Gallipoli).

These were all men of his own year. Among those who had come to the Staff College in 1889 and were then taking their second year of instruction, the following afterwards won high military distinction: Lieutenant-General Sir Ernest de Brath, K.C.B., Brigadier-General W. E. Fairholme, C.B., His Excellency General Sir Charles Monro, Bt., G.C.B., now Governor of Gibraltar, Major-General the Honourable J. H. Poett, C.B., Brigadier-General W. H. Sitwell, C.B., Major-General the Honourable Edward James Montagu Stuart-Wortley, C.B., Major-General F. Ventris, C.B., and Major-General Sir William Western, K.C.M.G.; moreover, among those who passed in when Cowans was in his second year were Brigadier-General H. S. Dawkins, C.B., Major-General Sir Edward Graham, K.C.B., Major-General Sir Gerard Heath, K.C.M.G., Major-General Samuel Lomax, who succeeded Sir Douglas Haig (The Earl Haig of Bemersyde, K.T.) in command of the First Army Corps and was killed at Ypres, General Sir Thomas Morland, K.C.B., Major-General T. D. Pilcher, C.B., His Excellency Major-General Sir William Rycroft, K.C.B., now Governor of British North Borneo, Brigadier-General Offley Shore, C.B., and General Sir Henry B. Watkis, K.C.B.

These names are particularly illuminating, for not only do they show the kind of men among whom J. S. C. worked for two years, but they also indicate, in the light of results, that the Staff College was at this period obtaining some of the most brilliant officers in the Army.

This had not always been so. Indeed, any visitor to the Staff College who examines the oak panels on which

the names of past graduates are there recorded from the year of its opening in 1858, will find it interesting to observe how few distinguished names there are for the first five and twenty years, and how many after that period. The reason is that, in its early days, the Staff College was looked upon, by men whose training rendered them conservative to an extreme degree, as a dangerous experiment. As General Younghusband has observed in *A Soldier's Memories in Peace and War*, old officers thought it "a new-fangled notion," young ones "a mug's game." And when, not so long before this time, a regimental commander had an officer whom he disliked, one who was unpopular in the mess or on parade, or looked upon as a duffer or a rotter, he got rid of him by pushing him off to the Staff College!

In course of time, however, it came to be realised that the "mug" who went there was the man who obtained speedy advancement in his profession. Consequently it began to attract better men, until the keen competition prevented any but those with high ability and outstanding qualifications from gaining admission.

That J. S. C. had carefully considered the opportunity it held out, there is no doubt. Having settled in his own mind that it would open a door to future advancement, it was characteristic of him that he should have worked his hardest to attain his object. His decision to compete was, in fact, one of many examples of his perception of opportunity, which at times seems to have amounted to intuition, and which helped him so continually in his career. Again and again in his life one sees that he always chose the right road, and that, when two lay open before him, he took the one which led him on to where he desired to be, for he was ambitious in the best sense of that often

misused word. Almost certainly he inherited this faculty from his grandfather and father, for without it John Cowans would never have attained the position he did; perhaps, too, it is a faculty that all self-made men, unless they are merely lucky, must possess and cultivate, but that they should pass on so invaluable a quality to their sons is not so usual.

Cowans, characteristically, at once threw himself into sport, especially cricket, and played for the Staff College both seasons. The captain of the eleven in 1890 was Charles Monro. Milo Talbot succeeded him in the following year. Hardinge, J. S. C.'s great friend, was wicket-keeper, and Cowans and Wintour were bowlers. Colonel Talbot says that "Cowans was a keen cricketer and a very useful bowler with an almost horizontal delivery and a break from the leg."

General Monro writes:

"I was a year senior to him and therefore we were not closely associated except at games. We were in the cricket eleven of 1890, of which I was captain; he played the game with all the keenness and vivacity which he displayed in his military life, always cheerful, and cracking jokes impartially with friend and foe. He was, on a tricky wicket especially, quite a useful bowler. We were a very happy side and this good feeling was much due to his happy temperament."

That cricket was not his only pastime is shown by Lord Edward Gleichen when he says:

"He and I were great friends at the Staff College, and used to play picquet together nearly every evening. He, much to our surprise—for he was pretty casual at work—came out top in topography, was also in the eleven, and rode much with the Drag.

"He and I rode a trip over Waterloo together, at Easter 1891. He was always pleasant and good-tempered; I never saw him put out by anything, however annoying, and he had big, sensible ideas."

He appears to have ridden a good deal at this time. In a photograph album in the ante-room of the Staff College Mess there is a picture of him with the Drag, but he is not mounted and has on trousers instead of hunting kit! But perhaps his most notable achievement on a horse occurred on April 19, 1890, when he was second in a Regimental Point-to-Point between Ashford and Smeeth.

A horse is a thing few people care to lend, but this was not so with J. S. C. General Younghusband, who said in his book that "there was never a kinder man, except Lord Roberts," when asked to quote a typical example, wrote:

"He was always that way. 'Not got a horse to-day (for hunting)? There's one of mine. Take it, I'm busy to-day.' That sort of thing. He was always the same to everybody, and meeting him after perhaps years of interval, he was exactly the same to you as he had been in the ante-room at the Staff College. A most lovable person."

There can be no doubt but that Cowans went to the Staff College at a most opportune time. He was just twenty-eight and, as it happened, one of the youngest officers in the batch. We have seen that marriage had probably developed his growing sense of responsibility. As has been mentioned, it was just dawning on the soldier that the Staff College was a real avenue to advancement and that *p.s.c.* after your name was well worth having.

From the wider point of view it was then also beginning to be realised that we had no Army in the correct sense of the term. That is, no body of men representative of every necessary branch of the Service with its own transport and equipment, its own Brigades, Divisions and so on, and, above all, with its own Staff ; in fact, no complete independent unit, every officer of which knew how to work in with the Army as a whole. The South African War had yet to come and teach us all this.

Cowans played hard at Camberley, as was his nature. It is noteworthy how unanimous his contemporaries are as to the casual way in which he took his work. General Wintour writes :

" At the Staff College we did not take him seriously, and he certainly did not so regard himself. I think he was undoubtedly the most casual officer there and did very little work unless he was obliged—and I think other people helped him too—about which he never made the slightest concealment. I remember, however, hearing Colonel Maurice (father of Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, K.C.M.G.), who was the Professor of Military History, say, ' I did not think he had it in him.' On enquiry I found out that the remark referred to the final essay which had been written by J. S. C. These essays, one at the end of each year, on a military subject, were regarded by our superior officers as a test of capacity.

" He was always popular, genial and good-tempered. I don't think I ever saw him put out, and I knew him well. We both played in the cricket eleven."

General Wintour's recollection about the essay is interesting as foreshadowing the ability Cowans afterwards developed to express himself, when he was so minded, clearly and well in writing.

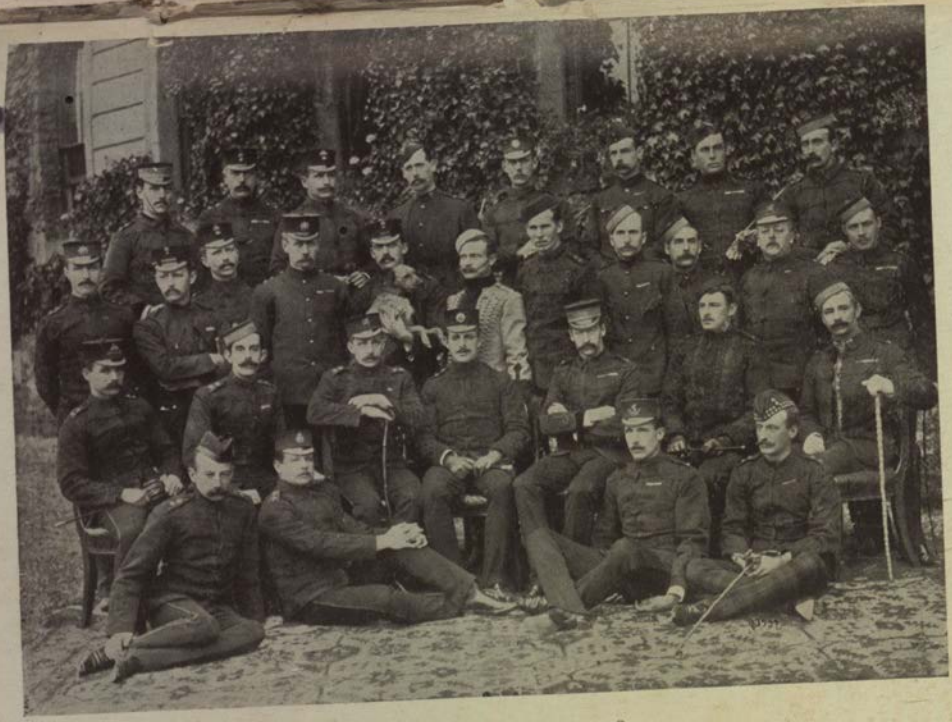
The majority of those who were at the Staff College perhaps hardly took him seriously enough, and indeed at that time it must have been difficult to say just how he would develop. He, however, struck General Pinney as a man more suited to the Council Chamber than the field, whereas General Ewart says that he formed just the opposite view and always considered a great leader of men lost in the great administrator. Writing of his keen spirit of helpfulness, General Pinney says :

" His wonderful good temper and good humour never failed him in those days. He always saw the pleasant side of all the sixty who were there and some of us were by no means his equals in any respect. He had seen much more of the world than most of us and his experience helped me twice—once with a welching bookmaker at Ascot, and another time when I was out of my depth in Paris. This help was given in the most charmingly good-humoured and spontaneous way, so that it strengthened our friendship, rather than the reverse, as is often the case when wise counsel is given to the inexperienced."

Colonel Vyvyan felt with everyone else " the attraction of his joyous personality," and adds that he was " impressed with his intellectual powers and facility of expression which, considering that he was, I think, the junior both in age and rank of his term, was specially remarkable."

General Johnson liked to chaff him about " his attention to the tape " and loved his " unfailing cheerfulness."

If a late starter, Cowans could always get there in time, and throughout his life he astonished everyone by his power to work without the appearance of making any effort. He came out, if not at the top, at any rate very



STAFF COLLEGE GROUP, 1890.

Back Row: Capt. Laffan; Capt. Blood; Lieut. Pinney; Capt. Lindley; Lieut. Woodward; Capt. Sir Harry Johnson, Bt.; Lieut. Spencer Ewart; Capt. Taylor.

Second Row: Capt. Richardson; Lieut. Count Gleichen; Lieut. Walter; Capt. Bruce Hamilton; Lieut. Davies; Capt. Younghusband; J. S. C.; Major Peters; Capt. Stuart; Capt. Knight; Capt. Crawford.

Third Row: Capt. Hudson; Capt. Aston; Capt. Vyvian; Capt. Gamble; Major Talbot; Major Forestier-Walker; Major Hawkins.

Front Row: Capt. Allen; Capt. Cromie; Major Wintour; Capt. Hardinge.

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near it. He entered the Staff College on February 1, 1880, as a Lieutenant, and passed out on December 19, 1891, as a Captain with a "Distinguished in Reconnaissance."

General Aston, who endorses the opinions already given by other contemporaries of J. S. C., tells us how this distinction was obtained:

"He had a reputation amongst his fellow-students for not taking the work very seriously, but he astonished us all at the final examination by doing brilliantly in the practical reconnaissance examination conducted by General Hillyard on an appallingly wet day, which reduced to damp pulp most of the sketches and paper work sent in."

§ 5

Cowans was fortunate enough to receive an acting Staff appointment within a few days of leaving the College, and in January, 1892, was attached to A.G.7 at the War Office under that most distinguished soldier, Major-General Sir Coleridge Grove, K.C.B., then a Colonel and graded as an Assistant-Adjutant-General. J. S. C.'s colleagues were Major E. W. Fleming of the Royal Artillery who was Staff Captain, and Major J. W. Murray, also a gunner.

Good luck never deserted Cowans, and during his first period of service at the War Office it was an outstanding advantage, which he fully appreciated, to be directly under Sir Coleridge Grove, a man of the widest experience and utmost distinction. Born in 1839, this brilliantly intellectual soldier and administrator

went to Balliol and took a first in Mathematics, Moderations and Greats. He joined the old Fifteenth Regiment in 1863, passed the Staff College in 1879, and was private secretary to three successive Ministers of War. He saw service on the Staff in Egypt in 1882 and held, while quite young, important and varied Staff appointments.

Sir Coleridge had issued the first complete Mobilisation Scheme shortly before Cowans joined his Section at the War Office, and at the beginning of 1892 was completing the survey of the ground in the vicinity of London and drawing up plans for its occupation, if need arose, by each particular unit that had been allotted for defensive purposes. In August of the same year Mobilisation Regulations were issued, and, since development showed the necessity for amendment and elaboration, a revised edition, embodying some important additions, was published in November 1894.

Cowans was, therefore, indeed fortunate when he was given a post under so able a leader, at a time when the most momentous plans for the mobilisation of the Army and regulations for its War Establishment were in the making.

The new scheme was all the more important because, strange as it may seem, up to 1886 there had existed no general plan laying down the method in which troops were to be put in the field in time of war, whether abroad or at home.[1] Even the duties which the Regular Army was expected to perform had never been defined. The forces were, in fact, in an unorganised condition as a

[1] *Vide* Memorandum by Sir Coleridge Grove, published in Appendix D to Report of the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa p. 247.

whole, and a sudden outbreak of hostilities would have found the War Office utterly unprepared.

The foundations of the Mobilisation Scheme were laid by Major-General Brackenbury (General the Right Honourable Sir Henry Brackenbury, K.C.B.), who was then head of the Intelligence Branch. Both the Adjutant-General, Lord Wolseley,[1] and the Secretary of State for War, Mr. W. H. Smith,[2] were impressed by his recommendations, which led to the Mobilisation Section being separated from the Intelligence Department and placed under the Adjutant-General.

Once the Section was definitely established, the work of organisation went steadily ahead, in spite of some political obstruction; system was introduced where chaos had been before; troops were detailed for special duties; stores and materials were accumulated at pre-arranged centres. At first the plans were intended for the mobilisation of an expeditionary force for service overseas, but gradually it became apparent that a more useful purpose would be served if the home defence requirements were given first place.

"I need not here go into the many reasons for this decision," wrote Sir Coleridge in the Memorandum referred to. "I will only say that one main reason was that any arrangements for home defence helped equally for a foreign expedition, whereas the converse was not the case. If we could mobilise our whole Army for home defence, the mobilisation of a portion of it for foreign service would present little difficulty. The greater included the less, but the less did not include the greater."

[1] Garnet Joseph, first Viscount Wolseley, K.P., died 1913.

[2] The Right Honourable William Henry Smith, P.C., whose widow was created Viscountess Hambledon.

As plans progressed it became clear that, while the Regular Army as then constituted could not put into the field more than two Army Corps and part of a third, three full Army Corps were required to occupy effectively the ground to be covered. Accordingly, the third Corps was made up of a mixture of Regulars and Militia. This was recognised as a makeshift, but it was better than nothing, for, as Sir Coleridge insisted in the conclusion to his Memorandum, "the military policy of this country, as embodied in the Mobilisation Scheme, represents simply an earnest endeavour on the part of the military authorities to make the best of existing material. It does not imply that material is what is required, either in quantity or quality."

Nevertheless, working with what the Army had got, the Mobilisation Section produced some striking results. That he had the opportunity of taking part in the perfecting of Sir Coleridge's scheme was not only of great value to Cowans as Staff training at the time, but was to be of inestimable advantage to him in the years to come, for the scheme was not merely a paper one, to be scrapped in a few years, but was to stand the test of practical application in 1899 and again in 1914.

That Cowans found his work intensely interesting there can be no doubt, and that he put in two years of incessant hard work we know. But this did not prevent him from looking on the lighter side of life as well, and it was during this time, while the Second Battalion of the Rifle Brigade was at Belfast, that he sent a telegram to his friend and brother officer Henry Wilson, addressed to "The ugliest man in the British Army, Victoria Barracks, Belfast." It was delivered immediately!

On June 13, 1893, Cowans's appointment was made

substantive, and he was gazetted Staff Captain at Army Headquarters.[1] General Sir Redvers Buller, V.C., K.C.B., was Adjutant-General, and was engaged in perfecting the organisation of the Army Service Corps which he had created during his term of office as Quartermaster-General in 1887, and again it was afterwards of the utmost advantage to Cowans that besides his work on mobilisation he was able to obtain an intimate knowledge of the machinery of the new Corps from top to bottom.

At the end of 1893 Field-Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, V.C., G.C.B., became Quartermaster-General in succession to General Sir Robert Biddulph, G.C.M.G. (the immediate successor of Buller), and little did anyone think at the time that the young Staff Captain in A.G.7 would sit in their seat during the greatest War in history.

Lieutenant-General the Honourable Sir Frederick Stopford, K.C.M.G., and Major-General G. F. Browne, C.B., both speak of Cowans at this time as one whose name was already beginning to be known as a capable administrator. General Stopford was even then particularly struck with his "ready grasp of a subject and his indefatigable power of work."

In September, 1894, J. S. C. was gazetted Brigade-Major to the Second Infantry Brigade, then commanded by Sir William Butler (Lieutenant-General Sir William Francis Butler, K.C.B.).[2] The appointment was a great plum for so young a Staff officer. The Duke of Connaught was General Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Aldershot, and had as his Assistant-Adjutant-General Colonel H. Miles (Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Miles, G.C.B.), who was

[1] The official description of the central organisation of the Army, now known as the War Office.

[2] Died 1910.

later to be J. S. C.'s immediate predecessor as Quarter-master-General.

The First Infantry Brigade was commanded by Major-General Charles Frederick Gregorie, C.B., and the Third by General A. H. Utterson, C.B., The Cavalry Brigade was under the command of Sir Baker Russell, K.C.B., of the 13th Hussars.

Sir William Butler was considered one of the ablest commanders in the Army at that time, and he had an extremely smart Brigade which always did well on parades and field-days. Major-General Raymond N. R. Reade, C.B., who was his aide-de-camp, says :

" We were a very happy family on the Brigade Staff, and Cowans proved himself to be a valuable Brigade-Major. Well up in his work from the details of a duty roster to the orders for a field-day, Jack Cowans made no fuss. His work was done, well done, and quickly done. Always in high spirits, he was very popular, and a visitor to the Brigade Office could be sure of a cheery welcome and ready assistance. I believe there are many officers in that Brigade who would acknowledge that they had received from Cowans not only kind words, but often sympathetic help.

" As far as I remember, the following regiments served in the Brigade at one time and another during this period: Northumberland Fusiliers, Warwickshires, Lincolns, Leicestershire, Middlesex, Rifle Brigade, and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders."

The Brigade Staff is always a fair target for criticism from the point of view of the Officer Commanding a Battalion. The Brigade-Major may be, and often is, very much junior to the Battalion Commanders. He has in the nature of things never commanded a Battalion

himself, yet it is his duty very often to go round and tell the Battalions that the Brigadier wants this and that done. Knowledge is useful; *p.s.c.* even has its advantages on such occasions, but tact is the one thing indispensable. It was just here that J. S. C.'s knowledge of the world and of men stood him in such good stead.

Sir William Butler was a wonderful soldier; he was splendid on field-days and at the "Pow-wow" afterwards he was inimitable. The tactful way in which he lightly let down officers senior to himself whose brain power did not always account for their rank was a lesson in diplomacy, which to the discerning was on occasions not untinged with irony. Many good stories concerning him were always going the rounds. The following is worth repeating:

A house in military occupation having been accidentally burnt down, the usual Court of Enquiry was held. Its findings were in due course submitted to Butler. His endorsement was that no one was to blame as the house "was burnt down strictly according to regulations."

He had a high appreciation and regard for Cowans and it was warmly returned. Once, comparing his Chief with others, Cowans said "he was like a Derby Winner amongst a lot of Selling Platers."

General Butler was succeeded by General Swaine, Cowans's former Colonel, who describes J. S. C. as "an ideal Staff Officer," with charming manners that enabled him to get on well with everyone. But the General lays stress upon the fact that he never allowed his amusements (which were many) to interfere with his work. Even the dullest of accounts and returns he would sit and work at until he had them finished, and then he would go off and enjoy himself. This he did with abandon,

and it was about this time that he appeared at a Covent Garden Ball as a Red Indian, "in paint and a few feathers" as he told a friend, and secured a second prize.

It will be noticed that his method was always consistent. The Staff Officer followed the same course as the subaltern, and, in later days, the Quartermaster-General did not change it. Work came first, but when work was done he was content to forget it for the time being, and to give himself up to play.

General Charles Fortescue was then Adjutant of the Fourth Battalion of the Rifle Brigade. The Adjutant may not inaptly be described as the buffer between the Brigade-Major and the Battalion Commander. His point of view is therefore a valuable one. Some Brigade-Majors can be very civil to the Battalion Commanders and quite otherwise to their Adjutant! General Fortescue says of Cowans:

"Even then Brigade-Majors were simply overburdened with office work, and it was so astonishing to note the alacrity with which he got through it. The 2.8 p.m. train used to take him up to London most days, and he came back by a train about midnight, yet his work for the Brigade was always done, and well done, and always up to time!"

The regularity with which he used to be seen lunching in London excited wonder—and some criticism—as it did later during the European War.

The red tape-ites never could understand how any man could get through his work in the time Cowans did. Nor did they approve of his clearing out of his office when it was finished. No. Their idea was to sit chewing a pen from ten to five whether there was anything to do or not, and it is no matter for astonishment that at the age of

forty that type of officer was so hide-bound with regulations and routine, so out of touch with life and with men, that he was quite useless to the Army and the nation, and put in the remainder of his service merely qualifying for a pension.

Colonel Albert V. Jenner, C.M.G., was then also serving with the Fourth Battalion of the Rifle Brigade at Aldershot, and he also voices the point of view of the Regimental Officer when he writes:

"I was very fond of Jack Cowans and can testify to his unswerving loyalty to and appreciation of the abilities of the General whom he then served. This fact, combined with Cowans's talent for his own work, his charming disposition and delightful manner with the Regimental and other officers, contributed greatly to the smoothness with which his often-times troublesome and arduous duties were carried out. I never heard a murmur of criticism as regards that Brigade Headquarters, though perhaps only Regimental Officers will appreciate fully all that it implies—how rare is the existence of this desirable state of affairs and how enormously such a spirit helps and lightens the burden of work of all concerned."

One morning Cowans wanted to call on the Fourth Battalion and he did so in the following fashion. Riding up to the window of the Mess, he bawled out, "Hello, you fellows! Put your shirts on Victor Wild for the Jubilee Stakes!" They did. Victor won at twenty to one, and that night the Mess drank the health of Cowans with enthusiasm and felt he was a Brigade-Major really worth having.

In the spring of 1896 the Fourth Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, then commanded by General Mends, joined the Second Infantry Brigade at Aldershot.

Shortly afterwards General Swaine received another command, and Major-General W. Osborne Barnard was appointed to succeed him. Since General Barnard had to come from Mauritius, however, General Mends, who was the senior Lieutenant-Colonel, assumed command for the Brigade and held it for four or five months.

General Mends writes :

" During this time I was in daily touch with Cowans and was struck by his great ability, only equalled by his capacity for work and unfailing cheerfulness. He had the happy knack of finding something humorous in the most depressing events, and a more loyal and delightful Staff Officer to work with there could not have been.

" I remember one instance in which the canteen accounts of a Battalion had got into a tangle. It was the Brigade's business to get them straight, and this fell to Cowans. The further we waded into the morass the more difficulties we encountered, due to the fact that the officers of the Battalion concerned were as bad at accounts as I was, and after many applications we succeeded in getting them given up as hopeless, and the Battalion allowed to make a fresh start. Neither Cowans, myself, nor the Battalion officer concerned liked being defeated, and we really had a bad time going through those dreadful accounts for years back. Cowans used to spend hours over them, and, though very much bored with the whole thing, he could always raise a laugh about something and, what was more, in spite of the work thrown on him, he always expressed the kindest sympathy with the Commanding Officer and Second in Command of the Battalion concerned.

" Shortly after, Cowans vacated the appointment and was succeeded by the late Sir Henry Wilson, also of the

Rifle Brigade. Colonel à Court Repington was then a Captain in the Fourth Battalion of the Rifle Brigade serving in the Second Infantry Brigade—a remarkable coincidence that three men in the same regiment and of such brilliant attainment should have been connected practically simultaneously with the same Brigade."

What General Mends writes is noteworthy in that it so clearly brings out a quality which only a very few credited Cowans with possessing; that is, a considerable capacity for drudgery and for performing cheerfully uncongenial work. Few jobs can be more harassing, dull or thankless than messing about with canteen accounts. And figures were not congenial to Cowans.

General Barnard, who took over the command of the Brigade from Colonel Mends, had something of J. S. C.'s sunny disposition, and the two got on excellently together. General Cockburn gives the following description of their relations:

"On my return after five years in India I found Jack Brigade-Major at Aldershot, full of work and enjoyment and in splendid accord with his General, W. O. Barnard, who was also an old friend of mine. These two were mutually pleased with one another, often went racing together, and did all their work in a most satisfactory, cheerful manner, as I found on going to stay with Jack for a day or two. Then, as ever, his capacity for getting through work was wonderful. I used to see piles of papers on his table, which looked as if they would take a day or two to get through, yet, in a couple of hours or so, all would be cleared and done with. Such was his quickness in sizing up a question, and the rapidity with which he got the grip of the matter, that in a few words his answer, explanation or decision would be recorded, and in doing

this at so great a pace he seldom made mistakes. His power of grasping a situation was very great, and this, together with the speed at which he could work, was of enormous value to him when he came to tackle the bigger things."

Cowans was the most delightful man to serve and the hardest. Hard because he was such an efficient Staff Officer himself, and such a thorough one too, that nothing less than the utmost efficiency was good enough for him.

When his appointment as Brigade-Major at Aldershot ended on August 31, 1897, he was still well on the sunny side of forty. Without having seen any active service he was, for his age, a soldier of unusually wide experience. A fair amount of regimental work as a subaltern; two years at the Staff College; two years at the War Office; and three years of the very varied and responsible work of a Brigade-Major at the headquarters of an Army; hard-working, popular, healthy, in love with life and with his fellow men, and by no means indifferent to all the colour and beauty women can bring into existence, he was already something of a social figure and had achieved a popularity that would have turned the head of a lesser man, or at any rate made him vain or conceited.

There were no heights to which he might not legitimately aspire to rise.

STAFF COLLEGE CRICKET XI., 1891.

Back Row : Professional ; Capt. Younghusband ; J. S. C.; Capt. Hughes ; Capt. Shekleton.
Second Row : Capt. Hardinge ; Capt. Lindlay ; Major Talbot ; Major Wintour ; Lieut. Pinney ; Capt. Stanton.
Front Row : Lieut. Dunne ; Capt. Gamble.

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CHAPTER III

1897—1906

Second visit to India—The Tochi Valley Expedition—Again misses Active Service—Joins Third Battalion at Rawal Pindi—Offered Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-Generalship at Simla—Declines and returns to England—Promoted Major—Appointment to Movements Branch at the War Office—Supervises Transportation of Reinforcements for Nile Expedition—The first autumn manœuvres—Preparations for South African War—Admiralty requirements not forthcoming—Mobilisation ordered—Cowans in charge of embarkations—Co-operation with Transports Branch of the Admiralty—Fitting up the Transports—The despatch of the South African Field Force—Embarkation carried out without a hitch—Lord Wolseley desires to display England's greatness—Is prevented—His Chief's opinion of Cowans—Rapid promotion—Goes to Second Division as Chief Staff Officer—The Clacton manœuvres—Second period at Aldershot.

AUGUST 1897 saw Cowans on his way to India for the second time. His first visit had taken place while he was an untried subaltern, a light-hearted, irresponsible boy. He was now a Staff Officer of much more than usual distinction, a senior Captain, and had acted for three years as Brigade-Major at Aldershot, the most important home station of the Army. He was thirty-five years of age but still without any experience of active service. This, as we know, was through no fault of his, and, when he sailed for India, it seemed that at last he was to have his wish.

The Third Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, to which he had been posted on leaving Aldershot, was then forming part of the Tochi Field Force which had been sent into Northern Waziristan to put down one of the most formidable risings that had ever taken place on the North-West Frontier. The territory through which the Tochi River runs had been taken over by the Government of India in 1895, but the country had remained in an unsettled state, and finally Mr. H. A. Gee, the Political Officer, who arrived in Maizar with an escort to enforce payment of a fine, was attacked by tribesmen. Several officers and men of the party were killed and wounded, and this led to the punitive expedition being despatched under the command of Major-General G. Corrie Bird, C.B.

Cowans left England with the expectation of joining the Third Battalion immediately on his arrival in India and taking part in the expedition. Again he was disappointed; again he arrived too late. The expedition had been a short one, and had attained its object by bringing the tribesmen to terms within a few months. The success, however, had been dearly bought, for the casualties from sickness had been very heavy, mainly owing to the men drinking the water, which was impregnated with saltpetre. The Rifle Brigade suffered so heavily that, although the operations did not actually cease until November, 1897, the Battalion was ordered to return to India in October of that year.

Colonel Richard J. Strachey, C.M.G., who was then with the Battalion, writes: "I remember very well that when we heard, towards the end of October 1897, that Cowans was on his way out from home to join us, it was the general comment that it was just like old Jack's luck, as we were then already standing by to march back to

India. He must have come away the moment he got his orders, as he joined the depôt of the Battalion at Rawal Pindi some time before the orders for his posting were received. Of course this failure to get on service was a bitter disappointment to him, but it is a most remarkable tribute both to his capacity and to his hold on the confidence and affection of the high military powers that, in spite of what to most soldiers would have been a fatal obstacle, he afterwards reached one of the topmost pinnacles of his profession, with the full confidence of all who knew him."

Cowans arrived at Rawal Pindi on October 28. It must have been a bitter moment for him when he learnt that the remainder of the Battalion was on its way back. It was, however, useless for him to proceed up-country, and he received orders four days later to take the details on to Umballa.

On November 14 the Battalion itself, or what was left of it, reached Umballa. Four and a half months previously it had marched out with a strength of 20 officers and 802 non-commissioned officers and riflemen, and it returned with only 12 officers and 540 other ranks, and 197 of these were admitted to hospital as soon as they reached their quarters.

Lieutenant-Colonel Montagu Curzon, Cowans's old Company officer, who had been in command, had himself suffered and had gone home on half pay, so that General Metcalf (then Major), as the most senior officer not in hospital, assumed command until Lieutenant-Colonel Kenyon-Slaney (Major-General W. R. Kenyon-Slaney, C.B.) joined the Battalion from England on December 14.

The number of casualties suffered by the Battalion during this campaign must have impressed upon Cowans

the need for strict orders where water was concerned, and the importance of seeing that those orders were carried out by the posting of water guards. Every lesson he learnt seems to have had an ultimate value, and this one was of help to him when he came to command the Presidency Brigade ten years later.

There can be little doubt that the short period he was with the Battalion must have been rather a trying one for him, for although a captain with sixteen years' service he had had no regimental experience since he joined the Staff College. During his stay he shared a bungalow with two subalterns, one of whom is now Lieutenant-Colonel Auberon Kennard, the other being Captain S. H. Rickman, who was killed in the European War. Colonel Kennard recollects that on the morning of his first regimental parade Cowans burst into his room with a rifle in his hand and exclaimed, "For the Lord's sake show me how this damned thing works!"

On a later occasion the Battalion was engaged in field exercises, Cowans's Company occupying a position to be attacked by the remainder, and Cowans, who was far more a Staff than a Regimental Officer, thought he would extend the scope of the operations, without however going through the formality of telling his Commanding Officer. He borrowed a troop from the 16th Lancers under command of an N.C.O. and gave them secret orders. In due course, when the enemy were reaching the decisive stage of the attack, they were astonished beyond measure to find themselves charged in the flank by cavalry which were not in the scheme. When the excitement had subsided a little, an explanation was forthcoming, and Cowans laughingly carried off the incident as only he could.

However, his distinction as a brilliant Staff Officer and his frequent absences from his Regiment made a long spell of Battalion duty unlikely. Colonel Strachey describes how the next change came about: "Early in 1898, when still at Umballa with the Third Battalion, Cowans was offered an appointment on the Headquarters Staff of the Indian Army at Simla. . . . I recollect his telling me of it at the time and asking me for certain information which he thought I could give him. He was rather doubtful whether he ought in his own interests to take an appointment in India at that time, and in the end I believe cabled home to his old friend, Sir Coleridge Grove, for his advice."

It would appear that Sir Coleridge's advice was to decline the Indian appointment, and, fortunately, Cowans acted upon it, again choosing the right road with that perception which has been already noted. Almost immediately afterwards, on March 9, 1898, he was promoted Major and posted to one of the Battalions at home and, shortly after his arrival in England, was given the appointment of Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General at the War Office in the Movements Branch, where he was definitely to confirm the reputation he had already won as an able Staff Officer.

§ 2

When Cowans returned to the War Office in the spring of 1898 Lord Wolseley had become Commander-in-Chief, Sir Evelyn Wood had succeeded him as Adjutant-General, and Major-General Sir Charles Burnett, C.B., was Quartermaster-General, the latter being succeeded in 1899 by Sir George White (Field-Marshal Sir George

White, V.C., G.C.B.). Cowans's sub-division, Transport, was Q.M.G.2, and in ordinary times his work would have been a matter of routine, and neither specially exacting nor specially interesting ; but, as it turned out, the period during which he filled the appointment was to be anything but normal.

At the end of 1897 rumours had began to come in that the Egyptian Army under the Caliph was concentrating towards Berber and that a Dervish advance was contemplated. Troops were at once sent from Cairo to the Sudan, and other battalions were despatched from England to take their places in order that the Army of Occupation might not be diminished.[1] So that when Cowans came to the War Office he was at once immersed in arrangements with the movements of troops for the Nile Expedition of 1898, which led to the reconquest of the Egyptian Sudan. The force for which embarkation had to be arranged was not large, but the campaign gave Cowans just the practical experience he required to obtain an intimate knowledge into the working of his department.

In the same year the first autumn manœuvres ever held took place, the Northern Army being commanded by the Duke of Connaught and the Southern by Sir Redvers Buller. Here Cowans gained still further experience in his new work, for he had in his hands the rail arrangements necessary for moving the 78,000 troops engaged to and from the scene of operations, and was also responsible, in conjunction with the Admiralty, for the provision of such shipping as was required.

All this, however, was but the prelude to greater events.

[1] *Vide* Winston Churchill's *The River War*, i., p. 361.

§ 3

Cowans remained at the War Office as Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General throughout the South African War, being concerned during the whole of that period with the arrangements for the transportation of the troops from England to Table Bay. From the spring of 1899 until the end of the war he was working in close co-operation with the Admiralty, and his Chief during the greater part of this time was General Sir Charles Mansfield Clarke, G.C.B., who became Quartermaster-General in September, 1899, when General White was ordered to Natal.

The ultimatum of the South African Republic was sent on October 9, 1899. Three days later the Boers invaded Natal.

Months before this, however, the dangers of war had been recognised by both the Naval and the Military authorities, and during April, May and June conferences between the Transport Branch of the Admiralty and Cowans's department at the War Office took place in order to examine various questions relating to the sea transport of two Army Corps and a Cavalry Division.

The Naval authorities had always stated that, given the necessary requirements, they could embark an Army Corps with a Cavalry Brigade and Line of Communication troops in a month from the date of the order to mobilise.

It was soon found, however, that the necessary requirements were not forthcoming. It was before the days of mechanical transport, so that horses were even more important in war than they are now, and it appeared upon enquiry that the stock of horse fittings—planks and

posts for stalls—and other horse gear was quite inadequate. One Army Corps alone required 15,000 horses, whereas it appeared that there were in store fittings for no more than 9,000, and water tanks sufficient only for the same number.

This state of affairs made it impossible to ensure the rapid despatch of any Field Force whose presence in South Africa might be urgently required at any moment. It was estimated that £97,000 would be required to complete the arrangements for shipping the Army Corps —£51,000 for stalls, £34,000 for horse gear and £12,000 for tanks. Had this money been forthcoming it would have been easy enough to make preparations at once. Unfortunately, however, it was not. The Admiralty was hampered by the fact that it had to come from an Army vote. But there was no provision for it in the annual Estimates, and, since war had not been declared, Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for War (The Marquess of Lansdowne, K.G.), did not feel himself in a position to ask for a Supplementary Vote. By such threads hang the destinies of those who serve their country.

Cowans was in close touch with Rear-Admiral Sir Bouverie Clark, K.C.B., the Director of Naval Transports, and his assistants, Captain Francis J. Pitt, C.B., R.N., and Mr. S. J. Graff, C.B. Naturally, they could not sit down and do nothing. Every week it was becoming more obvious that war on some scale in South Africa was inevitable; every week the danger of being caught unprepared for the despatch of troops was becoming greater. Accordingly, on July 17, orders were given for all troop bedding to be prepared, washed and fitted, and for all the available hammocks to be slung. New and less elaborate horse fittings were devised, and patterns of these were sent

out to contractors in London and Liverpool, so that, although no definite orders could be given at the moment, when the time came they might know exactly what was required and be prepared to go ahead on receipt of a telegram. At the same time particulars were obtained of many classes of steamers that would be adaptable for carrying horses.

On August 7 the War Office began to make tentative enquiries from the Admiralty and asked how soon transports could be prepared to carry 49,000 men and 7,900 horses. The reply was that, working overtime and with regard to the state of the labour market, from four to five weeks would be necessary.

After this the Naval Transports Branch pushed on with its enquiries, but even then no official preparations could be made, for no steamers could be chartered until definite authority had been given. All this time Cowans was working desperately hard. He had no responsible deputy acting under him, no one, in fact, higher than a second division Civil Service clerk. The work of the sub-division was very heavy and most of it, except straightforward matters of pure routine, had to be brought before him. Long before war was actually declared he and his staff were working overtime continually, and he found himself well served by his civilian clerks.

That he did not spare himself, but retained (as he did all his life) his preference for working far into the night, is shown by the following note from General Fortescue (Brigadier-General the Honourable Charles Granville Fortescue, C.B.): "I saw a good deal of Cowans just before the South African War, when I was Private Secretary to Lord Lansdowne. He was wonderful; he was always ready to interview anyone who came to see him and

always carried an armful of official correspondence to work off after dinner. We often dined together and went to a theatre or something of the sort afterwards, yet next morning when he got back to the War Office his work had always been done in spite of its large volume."

The speed with which he worked was one of the secrets of J. S. C.'s success as a Staff Officer, and during the weeks before the outbreak of the war he had time to grasp the intricacies of the task before him. Indeed, the quickness with which he could seize the essentials of a problem was one of his outstanding qualities; examples of it will be shown again and again in this story of his life, but the following may be quoted here as apt:

One day in September, 1899, just before the declaration of war, two brother officers, both of whom were destined to hold high military commands, were talking to him in his room in the War Office. A large map of South Africa was hanging over an easel, and a friendly discussion arose as to how the invasion of the Transvaal should be carried out. One of J. S. C.'s friends declared that his way would be to take his troops by the railway as far as Mafeking, and there derail in order to attack Pretoria from that side.

Cowans burst out laughing at this strategical lecture, and, with a few ribald remarks, asked him how on earth he thought he was going to protect his long line of communications. As the officer in question subsequently became one of the Ladysmith Garrison, his ideas on the subject of the invasion of the Transvaal necessarily underwent a complete change, and Cowans, of course, had instantly put his finger on the weakness of the scheme. It was not merely the Staff Officer speaking, it was the son of John Cowans of Carlisle and the future Quartermaster-

General, in whose mind was the ever present consideration of supplies and how they might reach the troops.

§ 4

On August 24, the First Battalion of the Munster Fusiliers was sent from England to reinforce the South African Garrison, the First Battalion of the Manchester Regiment being despatched from Gibraltar at the same time. During September further reinforcements were despatched from England, India and the Mediterranean, amounting to three regiments of cavalry and eight and a half battalions of infantry in all—just over 10,000 men.

Yet it was not until September 23 that Parliament sanctioned the expenditure of £25,000, which included the provision of 6,000 horse stalls, and the Naval Transport Branch set to work at once to order the necessary materials. On September 28, General Mansfield Clarke sent details of the force it was proposed to despatch, giving the ports of embarkation. Even this, however, carried no authorisation actually to engage transports.

The Lords of the Admiralty thereupon decided to act on their own initiative. At the moment there were available two large cargo ships of the Union Castle Line, each capable of carrying 1,500 men. In the ordinary way they would have gone to the Continent to load cargoes, but, rather than let them slip through their hands, their Lordships thought it better to engage them provisionally, without waiting for a formal requisition from the War Office.

The same evening a confidential circular was sent out to some thirty-five leading ship-owners, enquiring what ships they had available to act as transports for two or

three months certain, and on what terms they could be chartered. The Admiralty considered the matter so urgent that a reply by the following day was demanded.

The decision to incur this responsibility was entirely justified, for events now began to move quickly. At a conference held next day at the War Office in the Secretary of State's room, Mr. Goschen [1] gave Sir Bouverie Clark verbal authority to engage transports for the conveyance of the troops, Lord Wolseley, the Commander-in-Chief, saying that they would not be ready to begin to embark until October 21, three weeks later.

Having received the authority he had been waiting for, Sir Bouverie wasted no time. On his return from the War Office he found that replies to the circular letter had been received from many of the ship-owners, and by that night twenty ships had been definitely engaged.

Mobilisation was ordered on October 5, and on October 9, the day of the Boer ultimatum, the War Office sent the Admiralty the first official transport requisition—for 46,000 men and 8,600 horses.

Then began that active co-operation between Cowans's department at the War Office and the Naval Transports Branch at the Admiralty, which had such successful results in despatching the South African Field Force and the drafts and reinforcements which followed it.

Sir George Aston, himself an officer of the Royal Marine Artillery, describes how important was the personal factor in this co-operation :

"Cowans established an excellent *entente* with the Admiralty Transports Department over the sea transport of troops, and did much by personal contact to remove the

[1] George Joachim, first Viscount Goschen, died 1907.

appalling red tape that strangled the public service in those days. He seemed to have the whole of the movements of the Army to South Africa on his own shoulders, and what impressed me most was that he got through in as many hours as it took days for others to get anything done."

The usual procedure was as follows. Cowans, as Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General, would receive a requisition from the Adjutant-General's Department for the embarkation of a specified number of troops. Thereupon he would inform Sir Bouverie Clark's Department, naming the ports at which they were to be embarked.

In reply the Admiralty gave the name of the ship, the accommodation available in her and the probable date on which she would be ready to sail. On receiving this information Cowans filled up the accommodation, when necessary splitting up units and distributing them in two or more ships, in order that none of the space at his disposal might be wasted. He gave the units the probable date of departure, and the final orders for embarkation were issued as soon as he learnt from the Admiralty that the date of sailing was definitely fixed. His embarkation orders had, of course, to include all movements by rail; in fact he made all arrangements from the time the troops left their stations until they were put on board and warned of their destination. There his responsibility ceased.

At first the Admiralty did not care about giving the probable dates of embarkation, but, on Cowans's side, it was essential that he should be able to transmit this information to the units concerned. Cowans, however, personally smoothed away any friction that arose by keeping in touch with the Admiralty officials. Here it

cannot be doubted that his tact was, as usual, invaluable, so that Sir Bouverie Clark, who was old enough to be his father, told a friend, "I came to love the man." He was at the Admiralty almost every morning, when necessary going there two or three times a day. He himself thus described these meetings in his evidence before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa:

"We had a meeting with Captain Pitt, Naval Assistant to the Director of Transports at the Admiralty, who fits up the ships, the Director of Transports, and the Assistant Director of Transports, and we went into how many troops we could put on board each ship. Measures at first were really tentative—there had never been a despatch of such a big force before—and feeling our way, we used to have these meetings, as units had to be split up on various ships, so that the space might be fully occupied on all ships. We dropped them in the course of a few weeks, when we all became more conversant with the despatch of such a force." [1]

Here it will be well to include appreciations of J. S. C. from the two men at the Admiralty with whom he was working in such close co-operation.

Captain Pitt writes:

"He was *persona grata*, and had a room given him in our office. He was a bright and cheerful spirit, very quick to see the numerous sides of any question, and endowed with social gifts of a high order, which endeared him both to men and women. Sir Bouverie Clark had a great regard for him, which I shared."

To this tribute Mr. S. J. Graff adds:

[1] Minutes of Evidence, No. 2856. The Royal Commission referred to sat from October 8, 1902, to June 10, 1903, under the Chairmanship of the Right Honourable the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, K.G.

" Although more than twenty years have passed since Sir John Cowans and I worked in our respective departments during the South African War, my recollections of his cheery, manly, and able personality are still vivid. Just at the very beginning I saw him somewhat frequently, mostly in Sir Bouverie Clark's room ; but very soon a special Army Officer was attached to our Transports Department to act as a medium of communication with the War Office, it being found impossible for those in the thick of the work to spare time for inter-departmental visits. There is no doubt that Sir Bouverie had a great liking for Colonel Cowans ; it was very perceptible in his manner towards him, and I know they used to meet sometimes in the evening at the Naval and Military Club after the press of the day was over.

" When the South African War broke out Sir John Cowans was in a position of some difficulty as regards the relationship between the War Office and the Admiralty. Lord Wolseley had always, from the first publication of his *Pocket Book,* been a pronounced advocate of the Army doing its own sea transport, and it was clear to me from a slight passage of arms between him and Lord Goschen during the preliminary conference at the War Office at which Sir Bouverie Clark and I were present that he fully expected the despatch of the Army Corps to the Cape would confirm his view. Cowans agreed with him, as his evidence before the Royal Commission shows ; although he became a complete convert to the Admiralty view as the work progressed, some stiffness between the departments might have been expected at first.

" I can, however, confidently say that there was never the slightest friction. Both Sir Bouverie and Cowans were men of exceptionally charming manners ; they had

evidently made up their minds that the thing should run smoothly, and it did. Cowans had a peculiarly disarming smile.

"My last interview with him was when he vacated his post at the War Office, and brought up his successor to introduce him. I remember complimenting him on his work, and his turning the compliment aside with a charming modesty into a tribute to what I had done."

§ 5

The provision and fitting up of the ships was left entirely in the hands of the Admiralty, an arrangement which, before the war, had not been popular with the military authorities, who felt that, as the War Office found the money for the cost of Army sea transport, they should have more control. The Admiralty, on the other hand, had always maintained that such an arrangement could not be made with safety. Since 1876 the Naval Transports Department had been organised with a view to shipping a considerable military force overseas at short notice, on the assumption that the work could be effectively carried out in conjunction with similar service for the Navy.

The office establishment of the Transports Department, both clerical and professional, was intended to be a sufficient nucleus to admit of rapid expansion in time of war, and full particulars of all ships suitable for the conveyance of men and horses were recorded, based either on information supplied by the owners or by actual inspection.

On the outbreak of hostilities no change had been made and, although the Director of Transports was in constant communication with the War Office, he was

responsible for the actual provision of the ships, together with the administrative work connected with the sea transport, claims, accounts, and the custody of Army stores, including horse bedding and horse gear.

It was considered that the most suitable vessels for carrying troops were general passenger steamers of about 5,000 tons, with good first-class and fair second-class accommodation, and a clear space between decks which could be fitted up for the men. Such vessels could carry 1,200 troops and their officers.

For carrying horses, vessels employed in the horse and cattle carrying trade, particularly the latter, were selected, since they had the special advantages of good ventilation and drainage, with water laid on to the stalls, and electric light.

It took ten days for the Admiralty to fit up an infantry ship and from twelve to seventeen to fit one that was to carry cavalry. In measuring a transport for accommodation every man was allowed a seat at the mess table, Regular troops being given eighteen inches for this purpose and Yeomanry two feet, the latter having extra space not because, as the Chairman of the Royal Commission suggested, they were fatter, but because it was laid down as a general principle at this time that the auxiliary troops should receive special consideration in accommodation and messing.

In the same way Yeomanry received two inches more space in which to sling their hammocks than the Regulars. In working out the tonnage, a man was estimated as requiring four tons, a horse eleven and a half tons, and mules, which travelled in pens, three tons each. With the old fittings the horses had to be slung, with pads under their chests and haunches, but the new pattern did away

with this necessity so that they could stand up, and could usually be exercised every day; consequently there were comparatively few injuries and the animals arrived in South Africa in good condition.

Captain Pitt was himself responsible for these new pattern fittings, which he designed. He encountered some opposition from veterinary officers and others, but Sir Evelyn Wood was always on his side. The new design carried the day and was never altered.

In some instances the shipping companies fitted the vessels themselves, thereby saving the Admiralty considerable trouble and delay. For example, in his evidence before the Royal Commission, Captain Pitt paid the following tribute to the Cunard Company:

"I should like to mention one thing in connection with fitting out those vessels, namely, that often we took up vessels that were at sea when we were perfectly acquainted with them. Take these vessels of the Cunard Line, the *Pavonia*, the *Cephalonia*, *Aurania*, *Servia* and *Catalonia*; these five vessels were all at sea, but we engaged them. I went down to Liverpool and I saw their Marine Superintendent,[1] who was a most efficient officer, and I said: 'Look here, I want the Cunard Company to fit the whole of these vessels up for troops; our contractors are all full.' I went into his Board Room with him, and we got out all the plans, and planned all these vessels out, and he sent me round to Southampton the whole of those five vessels perfectly fitted; they were never altered from the detailed plans that I gave him, and not one of our officers had ever seen them until the time of inspection."

[1] Captain William Watson, R.N.R.

Once the ships were fitted they were inspected, to ensure that all the conditions laid down in the Transport Regulations had been complied with, the Inspection Board consisting of naval and military, medical and veterinary officers, and, besides providing and fitting the transports, the Admiralty was responsible for feeding both men and horses during the voyage, though fourteen days' rations and forage were carried to be landed with them.

The embarkations were usually so arranged that Cowans had the troops ready to go aboard in the morning to allow the ship to sail in the afternoon, for in those days there was no necessity for leaving port under the cover of darkness as in the late war, and the departure of a troop-ship took place with a certain amount of pomp and circumstance; certainly without any pretence of secrecy. When both horses and men had been put on board, the Naval authorities made yet another inspection to see that all the arrangements had been carried out, for, although Cowans's responsibility ceased when he had put the troops in the transports, the Admiralty's responsibility naturally continued until they had been disembarked at their destination.

Thanks to the precautions and preliminary arrangements made by the Naval authorities before any definite orders were given, there was no delay in the despatch of the first Army Corps. Both Cowans and Captain Pitt laid their plans with such accuracy and issued their orders with such precision that men and horses were ready to begin to embark, and the transports ready to receive them, nineteen days after the official authority to take up the ships had been given, and twelve days after the order to mobilise. In spite of strikes and other difficulties the whole tonnage required was ready by the

third week in October, although many of the cavalry ships, besides being fitted with horses' stalls, had to have scuttles cut, decks laid, and saloon and cabin accommodation built.

§ 6

Certain units of the Army Service Corps and Army Ordnance Corps were despatched in the *Braemar Castle* on October 7, but the main embarkation began on October 20, and the Army Corps of which the Field Force was composed, with the exception of the Household Cavalry, which was delayed by sickness of horses, and some of the departmental troops, was on board the transports by November 17—eight regiments of Cavalry, four batteries of Horse Artillery, twelve of Field Artillery and three of Howitzers, thirty-two battalions of Infantry, and eight companies of Mounted Infantry, besides units of Royal Engineers, Army Service, Ordnance, Royal Army Medical, Army Pay and Post Office Corps, a total of 47,081. This number did not include a mountain battery and three battalions of infantry which were despatched to make good losses sustained at Nicholson's Nek; the First Battalions of the Suffolk and Essex Regiments having been sent from England, the First Battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment from Malta.

Later, the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Divisions and the Fourth Cavalry Brigade were mobilised and embarked, and also a siege train. The Eighth Division, whose embarkation began on March 12, 1900, was the last to be sent out as a complete unit; and the remaining troops despatched from the United Kingdom were drafts to maintain the strength of the Field Force. The total number of Regular troops embarked by Cowans's

department from August 1, 1899, to May 31, 1902, were 98,826; auxiliary forces 36,568; and drafts over 90,000.

The majority of the infantry was embarked at Southampton. On the first day of the embarkation Cowans had twenty-five special trains running, and in the early days was putting on board 20,000 troops a week, while the Admiralty was despatching the transports at the rate of five a day. Owing to the rise and fall of the tide, Southampton was not so well suited for the embarkation of horses, and most of the cavalry were sent from Liverpool or Birkenhead, which, being the centre of the cattle trade, had special facilities, since vessels were locked in and stationary. A number of infantry and cavalry were also despatched from Tilbury and the Albert Docks.

For the accomplishment of this work Cowans was, of course, in constant touch with the Mobilisation Department at the War Office, and here his previous experience in that branch must have been immensely helpful to him, for as well as understanding the machinery he also understood the difficulties of running it. In this connection the following remarks by General Lake (Lieutenant-General Sir Percy Lake K.C.B.), who rejoined at the War Office in November, 1899, having been recalled from India to take charge of mobilisation, are of particular interest:

"The officer in charge of mobilisation was necessarily in constant communication with nearly all branches of the War Office, but that communication was especially close with the Quartermaster-General's Department and with the Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General, who was the officer most concerned with the question of transport of troops.

"It was just at this time that requests for reinforcements had begun to come in. The Fifth Divison had been ordered on November 11. The Sixth Division was asked for on December 10, and so on. Lord Wolseley had asked that a Second Army Corps should be mobilised, but the Government had decided to send reinforcements as successive infantry Divisions.

"The procedure generally adopted was, that it was the business of the Mobilisation Branch to organise and mobilise the Division, and the Quartermaster-General's Department to arrange with the railway companies for its movement to the ports of embarkation and, with the Admiralty, for its transport by sea to the Cape. In both these duties Cowans was the military officer most closely concerned.

"No one could help being struck by the practical ability he displayed. Combined with thorough grasp of detail—though he never suffered details to obscure general principles—he had unusual business qualifications. Furthermore, he had much tact, together with a power of appreciation of the point of view of the man he happened to be dealing with, which greatly facilitated the despatch of business.

"He was a rapid and accurate worker, and his efforts must have saved the country large sums of money as the result of the smoothness with which his arrangements worked and the absence of friction and consequent delay. Throughout the South African War we were always in close touch, and his work maintained the same high standard."

Cowans's Department was naturally dependent upon the efficiency of the mobilisation arrangements, for any hitch in mobilisation would have meant delay in

embarkation. The evidence before the Royal Commission clearly stated that " mobilisation was effected smoothly and with remarkable despatch." The following statement of Colonel Robb (Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Robb, K.C.B.), who was Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General at the time, is of particular interest as showing the way in which Sir Coleridge Grove's mobilisation scheme worked when put to the test :

" As far as the smooth working of the preparations is concerned, I think I may say that I have never known such an absolutely quiet time at the War Office as immediately after the issue of the mobilisation orders. Of course, mobilisation on such a large scale as that was an absolute experiment, and we quite anticipated that there would be a very large number of questions asked, and that we should be inundated by telegrams asking how this worked and that worked, but I can say from experience, and a lot of us noticed it, that we were perfectly surprised at the calmness and quietness with which every detail worked out, and it was also noticeable as subsequent Divisions went out. It gave us less trouble to mobilise a whole Division than to raise a comparatively small body of odd troops that we had to, as it were, organise *ab initio*, and the mobilisation regulations worked extremely smoothly as regards the formed bodies of men who were supposed to be mobilised under them."

The Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Kelly Kenny, K.C.B., endorsed this view and stated in his evidence that " the mobilisation went on like clockwork."

Cowans made it clear in his evidence that, although there had been a great outcry both in cables from South

Africa and at home that the cavalry was late, no demands were made by Sir Redvers Buller, the Commander-in-Chief, to send either cavalry or artillery out first to the front. He added:

"For a very long time we could not get an order from anybody, and Sir George White rather pressed him [Buller] to give the order of despatch, and he gave it us."

He denied the statement that had been repeatedly made that there was delay in sending out cavalry and artillery owing to ships not being fitted in time, for the Admiralty had never said that they could fit up a cavalry ship under about seventeen days. No demands for cavalry or artillery were refused on the grounds that ships were not available or fittings to hand, and, although he considered that at first the Admiralty was rather slow in fitting up the first ships, that was inevitable, since, as he said, no one had fitted up a cavalry ship since the Crimean War.

The transport of the Dominion and Indian contingents was carried out by the Governments concerned, though some transports were taken up in England and sent to Canada and on one or two occasions transports were sent to Sydney from the Cape under Admiralty arrangements. For the most part, however, the Government of India and the Dominion Governments chartered the ships they required, and fitted them independently without reference to the War Office or the Admiralty, the cost being eventually recovered from the Crown, so that Cowans was relieved of all responsibilities in this respect beyond getting in the embarkation returns.

§ 7

The disembarkation of the troops and horses in South Africa in most cases worked as smoothly as the embarkation; and one of the reasons for this was that the transports were despatched, not in a fleet, but in rapid succession, so that there was no over-lapping at the coaling stations which had to be visited on the voyage, and the ports of destination were fed judiciously rather than glutted. Lord Wolseley had desired to despatch all the transports on the same day so that they could sail down the Channel together as an imposing spectacle of England's greatness, but, fortunately for Cowans and everyone else concerned, he was not allowed to have his way,

In practice all destinations were marked " Cape Town for Orders," and on a ship's arrival at Cape Town the troops were either landed at once or sent on to East London, Port Elizabeth or Durban, in accordance with the orders of Sir Redvers Buller. Their arrival could not be accurately timed, and consequently there was inevitable congestion, but whatever delay there may have been in unloading stores, all agreed that there was no more delay in the disembarkation of troops and horses than there had been in their mobilisation and despatch.

In a Memorandum to the Secretary of State (Lord Lansdowne) dated January 30, 1900, Lord Wolseley wrote :

" In preparing, equipping and despatching this large body of men, the machinery of mobilisation and of embarkation has worked without a serious hitch of any kind."

This was a high tribute to Cowans's work and came from the highest quarter. But it was no more than he

deserved, and the delicate nature of his task is well shown by General Fortescue :

" He was quite wonderful in the way he worked in conjunction with the Admiralty without the slightest friction. I have always heard that he got on with the Admiralty officials in a way that no one from the War Office had ever done before, for there is usually a good deal of friction between the two departments."

On all sides his ability met with nothing but praise. Even the German Emperor is said to have commended his magnificent organisation, and we cannot round off this period of his work at the War Office more fittingly than by quoting the then Quartermaster-General :

" When at the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, I assumed the duties of Quartermaster-General to the Forces, I found Cowans in charge of one of the branches of the office, *i.e.*, Q.M.G.2, dealing with the movement of troops by land and sea. We were closely associated during the whole of the war. It would be impossible to speak too highly of his devotion to his work ; with a clear and rapidly working brain he never, so far as my memory serves me, made a mistake. As it was, his work was more than enough for any one man, and I often wonder how he got through it with so little apparent effort. Indefatigable and accurate, he was at all times the pleasantest possible person to work with. I have nothing but the happiest recollections of the time we were together."

General Altham (Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Altham, K.C.B.), one of the Army's most distinguished administrators, writes :

" I retain, in common with all who served in the South African War, a clear conviction that the transport overseas of the British and Colonial troops employed in

South Africa was a unique Staff triumph, exceeding anything that had ever been done before in the nature of overseas transportation."

Among other distinguished men who testify to the high service Cowans rendered during the South African War are: Major-General Sir Evan Carter, K.C.M.G., General Neville Lyttelton and Lieutenant-General Sir Henry F. M. Wilson, K.C.B., while Colonel Wenman Coke, who was aide-de-camp to Lord Wolseley, and in that position, and because of his great friendship and affection for Cowans, knew all that was going on, says that "he did everything single-handed and never made a mistake."

Nevertheless, during those hardworked years, he had not been where he longed to be. Again and again he applied to go on active service, and Colonel Coke tells us that as each Division went out he was promised that he would be allowed to go with the next. But when the time came this promise was not fulfilled, for he had made himself too valuable where he was for his services to be spared.

Lord Lucan bears this out when he writes:

"I think the hardest time for Jack Cowans was in the South African War. He had been unlucky in not having seen any active service. At that time I believe it is a fact that more than one General who was given command of a Division asked for him as a Staff Officer. But these applications were always refused eventually, as his services were considered indispensable in the Quartermaster-General's Department. So he was left at home eating his heart out, to carry on the great task of transporting a large army (as it was then considered) to a base 6,000 miles away. I know that he felt very

strongly about this, and the effect it might have on his future career."

Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker, K.C.B., also testifies that " he made every effort to get away and join his regiment in South Africa, but was prevented, being promised that in any case no one in the regiment would be promoted over his head."

It was his chief, General Mansfield Clarke, who saw to it that this promise was kept, as is shown by the following note [1] written by him to the Military Secretary in November, 1899:

You have asked me whether I could spare Major Cowans (Q.M.G.2) for employment on the Staff in South Africa.

On public grounds and on those alone I have felt compelled to say I could not.

His work has been and is excellent, and though naturally very anxious to go on service, he has behaved most loyally in the matter.

I hope sincerely it may be found possible to prevent his being at a disadvantage with those who have been sent on service and that his good work in a very responsible position at home may be considered sufficient cause for promotion.

(*Signed*) CHAS. M. CLARKE,
Quartermaster-General.

30.11.99.

The result was that he received his brevet before those serving in South Africa received theirs, becoming Lieutenant-Colonel on March 28, 1900, and, since three

[1] *The Army Quarterly*, July, 1921.

years' Staff service qualified for substantive rank, he actually secured promotion sooner than he would have done had he been allowed to go overseas.

That he was ambitious, we know, and this must unquestionably have given him satisfaction. At the same time he was more than what soldiers call a time-server, and we may be certain that there was something deeper in his desire to go on active service than the bare hope of obtaining rapid promotion.

He was now permanently marked out for Staff duty, and on April 16, 1903, having been promoted Colonel, he took up the appointment of Assistant Quartermaster-General of the Second Division at Aldershot under Major-General C. W. H. Douglas (afterwards General Sir Charles Douglas, G.C.B.); Lieutenant-General Sir John French (Field-Marshal the Earl of Ypres, K.P.) was then commanding the Aldershot District.

Major-General Sir Robert Montgomery, K.C.B., was Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General on the Headquarters Staff at Aldershot and therefore had excellent opportunities for judging J. S. C. and his work. He writes:

"I was on the Headquarters Staff at Aldershot when the late General Sir John Cowans was with the Second Divisional Staff. I can tell you exactly my impression of him. I think he spent less time in Aldershot than any other Staff Officer, and his work, as regard Staff duties, was always excellent. In other words, he had a brilliant brain, never havered over things, got his work done and cleared out. Added to this, he was the cheeriest of companions, and his General, who differed from him in most respects, was devoted to him."

The Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General of the Division

was Lieutenant-Colonel E. S. Bulfin (Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Bulfin, K.C.B.). He was struck by the same characteristics and sums up Cowans in very similar words.

Major-General H. C. O. Plumer (His Excellency Field-Marshal the Lord Plumer, G.C.B.) was commanding the Fourth Brigade, which formed part of the Second Division, when Cowans came to Aldershot, and therefore was also in close touch with him. Cowans apparently worked in perfect amity with the Brigade Staffs, for His Excellency gives it as his personal opinion that " he then showed the marked administrative ability which foreshadowed his later eminence " ; while Colonel O. C. Wolley-Dod, C.B., who was the Brigade-Major, says of him :

" I came in contact with him a great deal. A pleasanter man to deal with it would be impossible to find. He knew his job from A to Z and consequently never wasted a minute. I always credited him with getting through more work in an hour than many people succeeded in completing in a day. At work he was always sound and reliable, and off duty he was delightful company."

Major-General Bruce Hamilton (General Sir Bruce Hamilton, G.C.B.) succeeded Sir Charles Douglas, and while he was in command the Clacton manœuvres took place, when the troops from Aldershot were transported by sea from Southampton to test a landing on the Essex coast. This threw a considerable amount of work on Cowans's shoulders, but he had gained some useful experience in the autumn manœuvres of the year before on the borders of Berkshire and Wiltshire. As a testimony to his efficiency as a Staff Officer with troops, General Lake, one of the Umpires, recalls that when he was

watching the Second Division pass the point of rendezvous, Cowans rode up and called out to him: "We were ordered to pass here at seven-ten. Look at the time. How's that for Staff work?" It was exactly ten minutes past seven.

The Clacton manœuvres were of course more extended than those of the previous year and involved the transport of troops by sea. This work, however, naturally presented no difficulties to Cowans. Even the names of the transports were familiar to him, and he commented on the difference between their carrying capacity for a short voyage compared with a long one, a difference which certainly made matters easier for the Staff, but rather spoilt the manœuvres, since, for reasons of economy, the troops were mixed up together as closely as possible in the few vessels allowed; consequently their disembarkation was far less orderly than it should have been.

One of Cowans's outstanding characteristics was the faculty he had for establishing the pleasantest relations with his Chiefs, in whatever capacity he served them, and that this period of his career was no exception is shown by Sir Bruce Hamilton, who says:

"While with me at Aldershot he had many calls in connection with War Office Committees and official business in London. He was a very charming man, and he was a remarkably quick and capable worker. His great tact and many friendships made it possible for him to get his work done in a very smooth and easy way."

Cowans had come from the War Office to Aldershot with a considerable reputation, and his service on the Staff of the Second Division did but confirm it. Beyond the manœuvres there were no outstanding calls upon

his ability during this period, which lasted until February 28, 1906; nevertheless, from the point of view of the future it was an important time to him, for it brought him in closer contact with the troops than he had previously been for some years and so rounded off, as it were, his training as a Staff Officer.

By this time he had acquired an intimate knowledge of the machinery of mobilisation from the point of view of the General Staff, while, besides his work on rail and sea transport at the War Office, he had gained with a Brigade and a Division practical experience of administrative work, especially in connection with the all-important matter of supplies.

One may say that when he left his appointment at Aldershot he was not only still the "ideal Staff Officer" he had been described by his General years before, but ideally equipped in training, knowledge and experience for the work he had still to do. It was certain that, should national circumstances afford opportunities, a great future lay before him, for he was still only forty-four years of age.

CHAPTER IV

1906—1910

Appointed Director-General of Military Education in India—Lord Minto Viceroy—Lord Kitchener Commander-in-Chief—Becomes First Director of Staff Duties and Training—Sir Wilfrid Malleson's tribute—Laughter and the love of friends—Some Criticisms—Sir Francis Bond's tribute—Social life in Simla—The Devil's, the Lamb's and the Nursery Rhymes dinner parties—The Black Hearts—Cowans as a social figure—Sir Denison Ross's tribute—A good dog story—Sir John Hewett's shooting parties—Cowans attacked by infuriated bees—The Maharajah of Kuch Behar's shoot—Appointed to Command the Presidency Brigade at Calcutta—His sympathy with young people—Sir Sefton Brancker's recollections—Cowans calls on the Dalai Lama in State—Tibetan tea nearly makes Cowans sick—Sir Sefton Brancker's stronger stomach saves the situation—Brigadier-General Moberley's tribute—Cowans and a good horse story—Appreciations, from his Aides-de-Camp—A brilliant piece of staff work—Travel in the Far East—A merry voyage home—The Scottish Major who was not a Pussyfoot—Sir Bryan Mahon's tribute.

Seize then each happy hour the gods dispense,
Nor fix enjoyment for a twelvemonth hence;
So you may testify with truth, where'er
You're quartered, 'tis a pleasure to be there.

—HORACE.

IN February, 1906, Cowans was appointed Director-General of Military Education in India. At this time Lord Minto [1] was Viceroy, Lord Kitchener [2] Commander-in-Chief. Lieutenant-General Sir Beauchamp Duff, Chief of the Staff,

[1] Gilbert John, fourth Earl of Minto, K.G., died 1914.

[2] Herbert Horatio, first Earl Kitchener of Khartoum, K.G., died 1916.

Lieutenant-General Sir Alfred Robert Martin, K.C.B., Adjutant-General, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Sclater,[1] G.B.E., Quartermaster-General, and Major-General Sir Francis G. Bond, K.B.E., Deputy Quartermaster-General.

Cowans's reputation earned at home had preceded him, and he seemed rather wasted in his new appointment, which sounded grander than it really was; however, on the inauguration of a General Staff in India two months later (April 1, 1906), he became the first Director of Staff Duties and Military Training, when he was instrumental in putting the question of Staff College officers serving in India on a proper footing.

When Lord Kitchener first broached the question of making a Staff College in India, the War Office very pertinently drew attention to the fact that there were then in India a considerable number of British Service *p.s.c.* officers and several Indian Army Officers who had passed the Camberley course but of whom hardly any were employed on the Staff, and therefore, there was little to be said for starting a Staff College in India when India did not use the trained cadre they had got already. This consideration was placed very strongly before Lord Kitchener and Sir Beauchamp Duff by Cowans, with the result that a census was made of all available *p.s.c.* officers, who were then promptly absorbed in Staff appointments under the supervision of the Director of Staff Duties. This having been done, it was possible to discuss more seriously the great need for a Staff College in India to maintain an adequate supply of trained officers, a need which had hitherto been foolishly ignored.

At this time Major Malleson, of the Indian Army (Major-General Sir Wilfrid Malleson, K.C.I.E.) was

[1] Sir Henry Sclater died 1923.

serving on the General Staff in the Intelligence Branch; we cannot therefore do better than quote his words:

"The organisation of the Staff Duties and Military Training Branch of the General Staff, nothing of the sort having existed before, was a task of great intricacy and magnitude, and Cowans tackled it with vigour and with complete success. Being a Staff College graduate, with much experience of both the War Office and Aldershot, he was able to bring Indian conditions into line with those obtaining at home, and on all sides one heard that his work was most successful.

"Being on the other side of the General Staff—Operations and Intelligence—I had for the first year little direct knowledge of Cowans's work. But in 1908 I was brought into the closest official contact with him. The first of Sir James Willcocks's [1] 'week-end wars' had terminated in March of that year, and the Director of Military Operations, who had been Sir James's Chief of Staff, had gone to England on leave. Cowans acted for him, and I, being at the head of the Intelligence Branch, came directly under him.

"Then came further outbreaks on the Frontier, this time in the Mohmand country to the north of Peshawur, and Sir James Willcocks again took the field. The attitude of Afghanistan at this time was curious, if not highly suspicious. There was no doubt that large bands of Ghazis were on the move in Afghanistan with a view to active support of the Mohmands. All the fanatical mullas of North-Eastern Afghanistan were actively preaching a holy war, and it was currently reported that Afghan regulars were present with the tribesmen, whilst official

[1] General Sir James Willcocks, K.C.B.

Afghanistan appeared to make no attempt to suppress or control the active propaganda against us.

"Thus we in Simla had an extremely busy time, as not only had we to deal with Sir James Willcocks's actual operations, but we had to prepare for potential war on a much larger scale should the attitude of Afghanistan change from half-concealed to open hostility. Had the latter eventuated, both Cowans and I were informed by the Chief of the General Staff that we would join as Staff Officers the larger formations that would then become necessary.

"It was during these weeks of incessant work that I was afforded the best of opportunities of realising the great organising ability which Cowans possessed. Whereas it would not be unfair to say that India in general, and Simla in particular, had previously been famed for floods of talk and reams of writing with little or no result, *he got things done.* Knotty and complicated problems which had bothered individuals or whole departments for weeks, he seemed to be able to size up directly they came before him. He had a solution which generally pleased everybody, and which was almost invariably right. His methods of work were admirable. Once one had gained his confidence he was content to leave one with a completely free hand to run one's own job, and to back one up through thick and thin.

"In dealing with other and often obstructive and difficulty-raising branches and departments, he had a wonderful way with him. His genial manner and frankly friendly attitude seemed to disarm all opposition, and with a few humorous remarks he would bring round to his point of view the most obstructive of red tape-ists. My association with him during this busy period, which was

very close, left me with an unbounded admiration for his gifts as a Staff Officer.

"At a later period Cowans officiated for a time as Chief of the General Staff whilst Sir Beauchamp Duff was in England. His methods of work during this period fully confirmed the views of his outstanding ability which I had previously formed.

"I spent many years in Simla and, perhaps more than most people, had exceptional opportunities of seeing the work of a large number of men, all of whom attained high rank and some of whom achieved fame. Of all these, on the military side, I place Lord Kitchener and Sir Beauchamp Duff (as Chief of Staff only) in a class by themselves. After them I place Jack Cowans. By this I do not mean to suggest that he was a man of brilliant original ideas or of deep erudition. I cannot agree with those who attribute to him a profound knowledge of the larger questions of policy. He was, indeed, entirely ignorant of frontier and trans-frontier matters, with which, moreover, save for brief officiating periods, he never had anything to do. But he had the merit, which many lesser men profoundly lacked, of recognising his limitations, and in matters of which he knew nothing he was content to go for advice to those who did. He was a shrewd questioner and had the knack of arriving, by these means, at a satisfactory result.

"His main quality, however, was decision. This was precisely the faculty which almost all his peers lacked to a lamentable degree. One and all they feared responsibility. Rather than come definitely off the fence which was practically their permanent seat, they would advocate any method by which the responsibility of deciding any problem could be shifted on to other shoulders. Another

department should be consulted, a committee should be set up, and so on. I never knew Cowans descend to these all-too-common pusillanimous methods. He would take infinite pains to examine the pros and cons of any question, and having well weighed all the evidence he would arrive at a decision. It might be right or possibly sometimes wrong. But there it was—a decision, crisp, clear-cut and definite, ready for higher authority to accept or reject.

"It was this special qualification which, in my opinion, caused Lord Kitchener to have of Cowans the high opinion he undoubtedly entertained. Of all the other senior officers who were contemporary with Cowans in Simla, I would say that they were markedly his inferiors both in their mental equipment and their power of getting things done. Some of these, indeed, have risen to the highest military rank, have commanded armies in the field, and have had wealth and honours showered on them. But they were, and are, essentially dull, stupid and commonplace persons who, if ever they honestly cogitate over their careers, must be amazed at the heights to which Fortune has raised them.

"Turning now to the social side of Simla life it would be not too much to say that Jack Cowans was an institution. His capacity for making friends was unbounded, and his popularity such as it is given to few to enjoy. He was in request at every social function. No hostess planned a lunch or dinner party without his name being first on her list, and once assured of his acceptance she felt confident in advance that her entertainment would be a success. His wit and *bonhomie*, and his unlimited repertoire of amusing stories made the dullest of parties go. He seemed to have the rare faculty of bringing out

the best and liveliest in everyone, and he succeeded in making even the most portentous of bores amusing while in his company.

" It is not too much to say that into the usually dull and decorous—and indeed slightly suburban—official society of Simla he burst as a trailing meteor, a bright and brilliant being from some other world. His sayings and doings, which in any normal Simla habitué would assuredly have entailed something like social ostracism, were accepted, condoned, approved and even justified in his case because Simla believed that they represented the mode of the august circles in which Jack Cowans was understood to move, and consequently must be right. In other words Simla snobbery gained a marked victory over Simla prudery. Even the most austere of matrons would smile indulgently at anecdotes, cerulean in character and lacking nothing in the telling, related by him which, if ventured on by anyone else, would assuredly have led to no further invitations to that particular house.

" I imagine Cowans was fully alive to the motives which allowed him so much liberty, and indeed took an impish delight in extending that liberty to the verge of licence. Some of his practical jokes, though ludicrously funny in themselves, went perhaps a little too far, and were much resented by their victims. But it was characteristic of the man that he was always ready to recognise when he had exceeded reasonable limits, and it was usually the case that he and his victim ended by becoming better friends than ever.

" Often he would dine out nightly for weeks at a time. During such absences the Club would seem funereal, but it livened up towards midnight when Jack Cowans

returned from dining out and joined in the game of snooker pool at which he was an adept. These games, punctuated at half-hourly intervals with ham-sandwiches and black beer, would sometimes go on till three, five, or even seven in the morning, and yet Cowans would turn up in his office at ten o'clock seemingly as fresh as the proverbial daisy. Some curious acquaintance once asked him how he managed to put in a full day's strenuous work after so short a rest. To him Cowans confided that on waking in the morning he got his servant to rub his tongue with a green chilli! This, I imagine, purely fictitious remedy for late nights, was solemnly accepted as fact, and passed into currency as Jack Cowans's latest.

"I saw much of Cowans during these years. We always lunched together on working days at the lunch room at Army Headquarters, and on Sundays we always breakfasted together in the Club. The English post used to arrive on Sunday mornings, and he invariably had an enormous budget of letters. Some were from friends in the War Office or other Army centres at home, some from society people, and some from Royalty. In them would be a fairly complete budget of home news, official and social. Anticipations as to forthcoming Army promotions and appointments, the latest political doings, social whispers, and the newest amusing stories would come in this weekly budget, items of which would be read out to regale me. Having all these correspondents Cowans naturally had to write many letters himself, and on the weekly mail-day was generally to be found scribbling away to the last possible moment.

"Notwithstanding his many friends in the higher ranks of the army at home he did not place much reliance in them. It was his misfortune not to have been on

active service, an absurd reason for not promoting an able officer, but one which has always weighed with the Selection Committee to a wholly disproportionate degree. Any brainless duffer may have been in half a dozen of the India frontier or West African little wars without seeing much in the way of fighting, and fairly bristle with medals and decorations, and remain a brainless duffer still.

" Cowans had not been on service because always he was wanted for something else, generally a task which he alone, almost, was competent to perform. It was this lack of active service which often weighed heavily on him, and he would express doubts as to his becoming a Major-General. When I reminded him of his many friends at the War Office he would reply, ' The dirty dogs, once one is safely away, will feel no compunction in passing one over.' However, his gloomy anticipations in this respect were in due course falsified, to some extent, no doubt, on account of the very favourable opinion Lord Kitchener had of his great abilities.

" Jack Cowans entertained largely himself in Simla, and his cheery dinner parties in the block of Club Chambers he occupied were much sought after.

" In 1907 he went home on leave, and Simla was all the duller for his absence. I had also intended to go home that year, but the outbreak of serious disturbances in various parts of India that summer prevented my going. At his request I wrote frequently to him on Indian affairs, and I have good reason to believe that the information I was able to give him was brought to the notice of very high authorities.

" Eventually his time in Simla came to an end and he left to take up a Brigade Command in Calcutta, greatly to our regret. I stayed with him for a Christmas week

later in Calcutta, and found that there, as in Simla, he had won all hearts, and was the life and soul of every gathering.

"In 1909, when Sir O'Moore Creagh (afterwards General Sir O'Moore Creagh, V.C., G.C.B.) succeeded Lord Kitchener as Commander-in-Chief, one of the first questions he had to decide was the location of a newly-raised Gurkha regiment. The Adjutant-General, himself an ex-Gurkha, was all for placing this regiment in the Peshawar area, where it no doubt would have been very useful. The Quartermaster-General, in whose province the location of new cantonments lay, had been won over to the Adjutant-General's view. Meanwhile Bengal, almost devoid of regular troops, was reeking with seditious and murderous societies, and the Lieutenant-Governor of that province was most anxious to have the Gurkhas in his area. Sir O'Moore Creagh therefore detailed me to make an extended reconnaissance of possible sites in the Darjeeling district for a new cantonment.

"The procedure was distinctly irregular. In the first place the job was properly one for the Quartermaster-General's Department, and not for the General Staff, to which I belonged. Secondly the local General, *i.e.*, Cowans, ought to have been previously consulted in the matter. As it was, Cowans's first knowledge of what was intended was when I arrived in Darjeeling and showed him my instructions. He greatly resented what he thought was a slight on the part of the Commander-in-Chief, and declared that had the officer sent been anyone but myself, an old friend, he would have taken up the matter officially.

"However, all went smoothly thereafter, and after three weeks' searching of Sikkim I selected a site, got Cowans to come out and approve of it, and the Gurkha

cantonment thus materialised. This was the last I saw of Cowans in India. Shortly afterwards he went home to become head of the Territorial Army organisation. It is no secret, however, that at this period he might have been Adjutant-General in India had he so wished.

" Thereafter I remained in correspondence with him. When the War started in 1914 I went to East Africa and he wrote to me there to send him some details of our doings, of which, he said, they could learn little or nothing at home. In 1916 I left East Africa, arriving in London with nothing better than a copy of a telegram from General Smuts to the War Office specially recommending me to be promoted to Major-General for distinguished service in the field. I handed this in at the War Office when reporting my arrival and asking for orders. Some days later I got a note from Cowans saying my special promotion had passed successfully through the Army Council and would appear in the *Gazette* forthwith.

" It was characteristic of the man, then immersed in the most gigantic of tasks, to find time to write to an old friend thus. Unfortunately my promotion was blocked at the India Office, though neither there nor at the War Office could I find out why. It was Cowans, again, who gave me an introduction to the new Military Secretary, Sir Francis Davies, which led to an exposition of the underhand methods which had been employed, and when, a year later, I eventually obtained my promotion, antedated twelve months, it was Cowans who was the first to write and congratulate me on a successful issue from a prolonged struggle.

" I feel that I have written too much about my own affairs, but it was necessary to do so in order to show the continued loyalty and support of the best and kindest,

as well as the most interesting and amusing, of friends."

In April, 1907, the Staff College was moved from Deolali to Quetta. At the time General Montgomery (then Colonel) was senior professor, and, in the absence of the Commandant, Major-General Sir Thompson Capper, K.C.M.G., in Manchuria, he became responsible for the move and for the opening of the new premises. When he arrived at Quetta the new College was far from ready. There were no floors laid and there were no arrangements for heating and light, and yet the building had to be opened in a month. Nevertheless, somehow or other, the work was completed in the time, but General Montgomery says, " Had it not been for the help given to me by Jack Cowans we could not possibly have done it. I worried the life out of him, but he was always keen to help and bore with me wonderfully."

§ 2

No account of J. S. C. would be in the least faithful that did not mention the light-hearted side of his nature. It naturally, amongst prigs, Pharisees and solemn official people, aroused dislike and criticism, but he went serenely and joyously on his way. Lord Kitchener admitted that he found it incomprehensible but he would not presume to judge it, saying it never interfered with Cowans's work. Indeed, without it, that work could hardly have been accomplished. This would never be understood by people like Lord St. Davids (Viscount St. Davids, G.B.E.), who, in the House of Lords, accused Lord French and the G.H.Q. Staff in France of frivolity —and worse—during the European War. The same people blamed the soldiers serving in England and, particularly,

those home on leave for accepting to the utmost their opportunities of enjoyment and pleasure. Cold-blooded dwellers in safety at home might be able to afford to depress themselves with drab and solemn attitudes. Not so those who had to work and fight.

The close intimacy of official and social life at Simla from November to April makes anything like privacy impossible, and it was one of J. S. C.'s strongest traits that he was as open and frank as the day. In fact, a little more personal circumspection, while it might have detracted from the charm of his personality, would have served his professional career. But he was one of those men who could say and do things for which another man would be sent to Coventry or even reprimanded. He was a perfect example of the trite saying that one man may steal a horse with impunity where another dare not look over the hedge. General Bond's considered judgment of him is also worthy of full quotation. It admirably supplements—and in some particulars contradicts—that of General Malleson; combined they give a full and graphic picture of the official side of his life during the Simla period; the social glimpses are there also, because Cowans was by nature quite incapable of the measure of inhumanity a man must possess before he can with complete success divide his life into watertight compartments.

General Bond writes:

"It was in Simla, when he had come out from the War Office to strengthen Lord Kitchener's Staff at the Headquarters of the Army in India, that I first met Colonel John Cowans.

"His appointment under the Chief of the Staff was one which kept him busy with highly confidential matters

concerning the Border policy of the Indian Government, matters in which, in the administration involved, all branches of the Staff were concerned one way or another.

"Cowans assumed his responsibilities at once with so little apparent effort, and with so little fuss or stirring of the political waters, that credit was not always given him, by those who knew him only socially, for the amount of work he contributed.

"His grasp was quick and far-reaching, and the lucidity of expression of his views and opinions unusual. I remember one morning, when my work as Deputy Quartermaster-General required a guiding light from the General Staff, and when, with a heavy file under my arm, I went into his office to make the necessary enquiries.

"As I entered, Jack Cowans was writing a lengthy minute on Frontier policy. He greeted me with the usual fun and badinage with which he barraged all his serious operations. A lively conversation ensued, out of which I was able to cull all the information I required.

"All the time he was steadily writing his minute. As I got up to go, he said:

"'Wait a minute, old chap, and read this, and tell me whether you think it all right.'

"It happened that I had recently come from an office in the Headquarters of the Northern Army, to which Border intelligence was entrusted, and that the subject of his minute was one with which I was fully conversant.

"To my astonishment I read a close-reasoned and admirably complete note, in excellent English, covering, and discussing a question of policy of high importance. It was written with the ease of complete knowledge of the data of the problem, as well as of the idiosyncrasies of the Border tribes concerned. The summing up and

conclusion of the note had been written rapidly while he was talking to me of entirely diverse matters. Not a word or a stop was wanting or out of place, and I could find no fault with reasoning or method of expression. The conclusion was shrewdly and forcefully convincing.

"The work of the Staff was complicated at that time by the fact that, behind the consideration of the defence of the gates of India from the northern foe, Lord Kitchener's main purpose was to use all his great powers of organisation and diplomacy for a far more difficult task.

"This was no less than, as an integral part of the reorganisation and redistribution of the forces against Russia, completely to reorganise and equip the nine divisions of the Indian Army so that they might be available for the coming German war, of the inevitability of which he was profoundly convinced. The construction of machinery for creating a Staff, of factories and arsenals for supply of weapons and ammunition, and of means for facilitating war training and of providing all auxiliary services and reserves were intrinsic parts of this scheme.

"With superhuman foresight and intense thoroughness, his most salient qualities, Kitchener pushed, with every force he could control, this task of first Imperial importance.

"Had he shown his whole hand at any time, it goes without saying that a Government which included Haldane and Morley would have speedily had him recalled.

"In the middle of these preparations, designed to transform a chaos of units, without transport, equipment, reserves, or any definite war scheme, into a first-rate and

fully prepared fighting force, ready for deportation to whatever war area might be decided on, the ostensible reasons for the whole reorganisation fell to pieces with the conclusion of the *entente* with Russia.

"Immediately all allotments of funds were cut down to the lowest level, and the scrutiny of the India Office was imposed on every item exceeding £3,000 (50,000 rupees).

"The reorganisation of the Medical Services was not even begun, and its postponement to the time when the European War had actually commenced was one of the consequences of the new complication. [1]

"This is not the place to discuss the rights and wrongs of these matters of far-reaching importance, and they are alluded to only to show the extraordinary difficulties with which the Staff had to deal.

"For our purpose it is enough to say that John Cowans was throughout an illuminating force in the counsels of the Commander-in-Chief, and that Kitchener owed much to his powerful assistance and lucid dissection of the political tangles.

"The difficulty of the position for the Chief would have been overwhelming had not Lord Minto and the gracious lady who was his helpmate and counsellor, with that quiet wisdom and foreknowledge which characterised their whole stay at Viceregal Lodge, shown a right sporting appreciation of Kitchener's forecast, prompting them to give him their powerful and never-failing friendship and support.

"In this Jack Cowans's social qualities, blended with

[1] It is noteworthy that later Cowans had himself to repair in Mesopotamia, as Quartermaster-General, the results of this failure to continue the re-organisation of the Administrative Services of the Indian Army.

his purposeful assistance and irresistible fun, rendered the relations of the General Staff with the Viceregal Court a delightful and effectual screen behind which many serious questions found adjustment.

" I have spoken of his fun, and indeed he had the heart of a boy, often a very naughty boy, but one who gained the affection of all who knew him, however diverse their aspect might be.

" That he was loved by many women goes without saying, but they were not alone, for he inspired affection in men just as easily, even though their outlook had little in common with his own.

" His bodily strength was prodigious, and he never tired. Hard days were followed by hard nights, yet he never seemed to weary.

" I don't believe he ever went to bed early, for like the bird of wisdom which watches over the destinies of the Staff College, he had a sleepless brain and eye for use by night, as his tired Staff, later on in the days of the Great War, knew to their cost. Much of his best work was carried through in the watches of the night.

" Whilst no amount of work or responsibility tired him, the profoundest and most intense application to the urgent problems of his office never checked the flow of his fun and lightheartedness.

" His presence in Simla each season during his retention of his Staff appointment added brightness and snap to the social fabric.

" Simla works hard by day, and never fails in enjoyment when the day's work is over. Brilliancy of entertainment and witty conversation are a delightful antidote there to the sterner and often tiring work of the offices. In the lighter side of life, Jack Cowans was a

leader of daring and of such abandon that at times Simla held its breath.

"Later on, his transfer to an important command marked Lord Kitchener's approval and friendship. Cowans's tenure of the Presidency Command was marked by the same ability and activity and rendered the work of the administrative branches of Headquarters a simple matter, as far as his command was concerned, for his mental equipment was rarely at fault where organisation was required, and decisions came to him with equal truth and facility."

§ 3

So much nonsense has been talked and written about Cowans's social life both at Simla and Calcutta that some account of it, based on the recollections of those who knew him at the time and were guests at his parties, is essential.

One episode which attracted considerable attention, and even gave rise to some criticism, was the Devil's Dinner Party, given in honour of the birthday of the daughter of a very high official.

J. S. C. was living in one of a set of two chambers at the Club gates, the other being occupied by Mr. Arthur Roylance Jelf, I.C.S. It was General Malleson who christened Cowans's quarters *Nid d'Amour*. The party was given at the Chalet, which was a detached portion of the Club, where lady guests could be entertained.

Among many other entertainments given by J. S. C. was the Lamb's Dinner Party, in honour of Miss Mary du Cane Smythe (Mrs. Cairns Wicks), who got her nickname because J. S. C. said, "She always looked such a little lamb."

This was her birthday-party and was organised with that care and attention to detail, which was associated with everything Cowans did. The table was decorated to represent meadowland—there were green fields, hedges, hurdles and small lambs and sheep dotted about. At the end of the evening a live lamb was brought in, round its neck a blue ribbon with a bell. It was presented to Miss Smythe, and caused some diversion later while being taken home behind her rickshaw.

The group of the Nursery Rhyme Dinner Party reproduced, another of J. S. C.'s inspirations, is typical of such gatherings. Everyone had to go in Nursery Rhyme dress, and there were all sorts of quaint dishes at dinner. One, a huge "roly-poly" pudding, the size of a bolster; another, a large pie out of which, when placed on the table and cut, flew four-and-twenty birds, as in "Sing a Song of Sixpence."

Entertainments such as these may seem childish to those who do not realise that the European population of an isolated hill-station like Simla are very much dependent on each other for recreation and amusement. To find distinguished soldiers and high officials spending much time and care on the organisation and elaboration of such affairs, is only evidence that it is a matter of duty and of policy to encourage to the utmost such recreation as circumstances permit.

That Lord Kitchener viewed such entertainments with equanimity is shown by the story of how, returning home unexpectedly one night, he found his aides-de-camp entertaining a party (which inevitably included J. S. C.) and for which, by special request of the ladies and without authority, all the Commander-in-Chief's gold plate had been brought out! Yet even this episode, we are told

by one of the guests, K. accepted good humouredly, much to the relief of his apprehensive Staff.

As a matter of fact, contrary to popular belief, Lord Kitchener had a very keen sense of humour and thoroughly enjoyed a good joke. His personal Staff were chosen from amongst light-hearted and cheerful people such as O. A. G. Fitzgerald of the Indian Army (afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel O.A.G. Fitzgerald, C.M.G.) who, becoming his aide-de-camp in 1905, remained his life-long friend, was recalled to his side during the strenuous days of the European War and eventually perished with him in the *Hampshire*; another, and perhaps equally great favourite, was F. A. Maxwell (Major F. A. Maxwell, V.C., D.S.O.) of the Tiwana Lancers; "Ginger" Bassett (Captain W. F. Bassett) of the Rifle Brigade completed a trio of aides-de-camp who were as amusing as they were efficient.

It is also perhaps worth recording, in view of after events, that at this time Colonel Birdwood (General Sir William Birdwood, Bt., G.C.B.) was Assistant Military Secretary and Persian Interpreter to Lord Kitchener. He afterwards became his Military Secretary and eventually (in 1909) succeeded to the Command of the Kohat Brigade. With all these Cowans was, of course, intimate and friendly, and several of them are to be found in the picture of the Nursery Rhymes Dinner Party, at which J. S. C. appeared as Little Boy Blue.

That there was ever anything discreditable about such parties may be dismissed as ill-natured gossip, because Lord Kitchener's Staff always took part in them, and the Commander-in-Chief was himself present at them from time to time.

At this time the society known as The Black Hearts was a prominent feature of Simla life. It was an

exclusive club composed of bachelors, grass widowers and other temporarily or permanently unattached men, and was organised for the purpose of returning and dispensing hospitality.

Its parties and balls were famous. Members wore black knee-breeches and stockings, and red ribbons with black glass hearts round their necks. Dance programmes were always in red with a black devil and " He is not so black as he is . . . "

J. S. C. was elected Grand Master, a proof of his great popularity, and his term of office was one of the most successful the brotherhood has ever known.

Mr. Arthur Jelf, who was at this time in the Foreign Office at Simla, shared quarters with Cowans. It was said of Cowans, as of a much more exalted personage, that although he could read he had never been known to do so. Mr. Jelf had unequalled opportunities of knowing, and says that " the way Cowans kept himself in touch with modern European politics and literature by getting new books out from England by each mail was wonderful. Few realised how well-read he was.

" He was," continues Mr. Jelf, " a man to whom people in difficulty or trouble instinctively turned, and I believe they could always be sure that he would be ready to help if it was in any way possible. In fact he was one of the most lovable men I have ever met."

Another tribute is from the pen of Mr. Jelf's brother, Lieutenant-Colonel Rudolf George Jelf, C.M.G., of the Second Battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps:

" I associate him chiefly with life in Simla. My chances of seeing him during the cold weather, were, owing to my being on tour with the Viceroy, few and rather far between; I always used to feel that one's pleasures in

Calcutta were so well provided for, that polo, shooting, paper-chasing, golf, cricket, racing and steeplechasing used all to carry off their respective followers, and it was only at places like 'Golightly' that we used to meet and foregather once a fortnight, and find Jack Cowans, as usual, invariably in his best form.

"The chances of meeting at Simla were infinitely greater and of more frequent occurrence, and those who lived with him during many happy summers in the United Services Club could, I feel certain, tell many a good yarn of his escapades and good-humoured jests; and I would go so far as to say that very few of the many who were privileged to know him, had not, at some time or other, a kindly word said to him, or a kindly deed done to him by this charming and unique man."

Enquire where you will from women or from men and you will always hear of how real and unchanging was the kindliness, the humanness and helpfulness of Cowans.

Colonel Baird (Brigadier-General A. W. F. Baird, C.B.) writes of him:

"I have nothing of his except a never-fading memory of his great kindness and generous help on numberless occasions. In 1907 I spent the summer on his Staff in Simla—having been specially sent for by him."

Professor Sir Denison Ross, C.I.E., who knew him well in India, was afterwards his fervent admirer and friend, as was Lady Ross. Sir Denison writes:

"Never was any man more capable of putting life into a party, and his presence in a hill-station was a guarantee that things would go well in the matter of big dinners and dances. His gaiety was infectious, and his chaff inexhaustible. He lived what to most men engaged in daily duties and responsibilities would have been an impossible

life. He could sit up till all hours, taking no thought for the morrow, but when the morrow came he had always that same readiness for work and the lightning despatch of business. Calcutta, Simla and Darjeeling all learnt to appreciate the magic of his charm."

A good story may here be told to illustrate his love of sitting up late. In that, as in so many things, he was just a great big child who (fortunately) never grew up and never lost the precious gift of a childlike heart. He was always fond of dogs and at Simla he had a favourite white West Highland (Poltalloch) terrier to which he was devoted. It was, very suitably, named "Sporran." A lady once asked him in wonder how he managed to work and play so hard, suggested danger to his health and strongly advised him always to wear flannel and to go to bed early.

"But my dear lady," he remonstrated, "it's a most dangerous thing to go to bed early. The other night I got back to my rooms before twelve o'clock—and Sporran bit me!"

Like most people who visit India, he did some tiger-shooting which, however, he never took very seriously.

By no stretch of the imagination could he be called a big-game shot. He had neither the temperament nor the inclination of the true hunter. It is a recognised principle of jungle work not to play the Spartan till it is absolutely essential, but J. S. C. took good care never to be in circumstances that would render it necessary for him to undergo any hardships at all.

One cannot blame him in the least. If he loved to do things in a comfortable way, he certainly never pretended otherwise. He was not the man to go tracking through heavy jungle, where thorns and leaches abound,

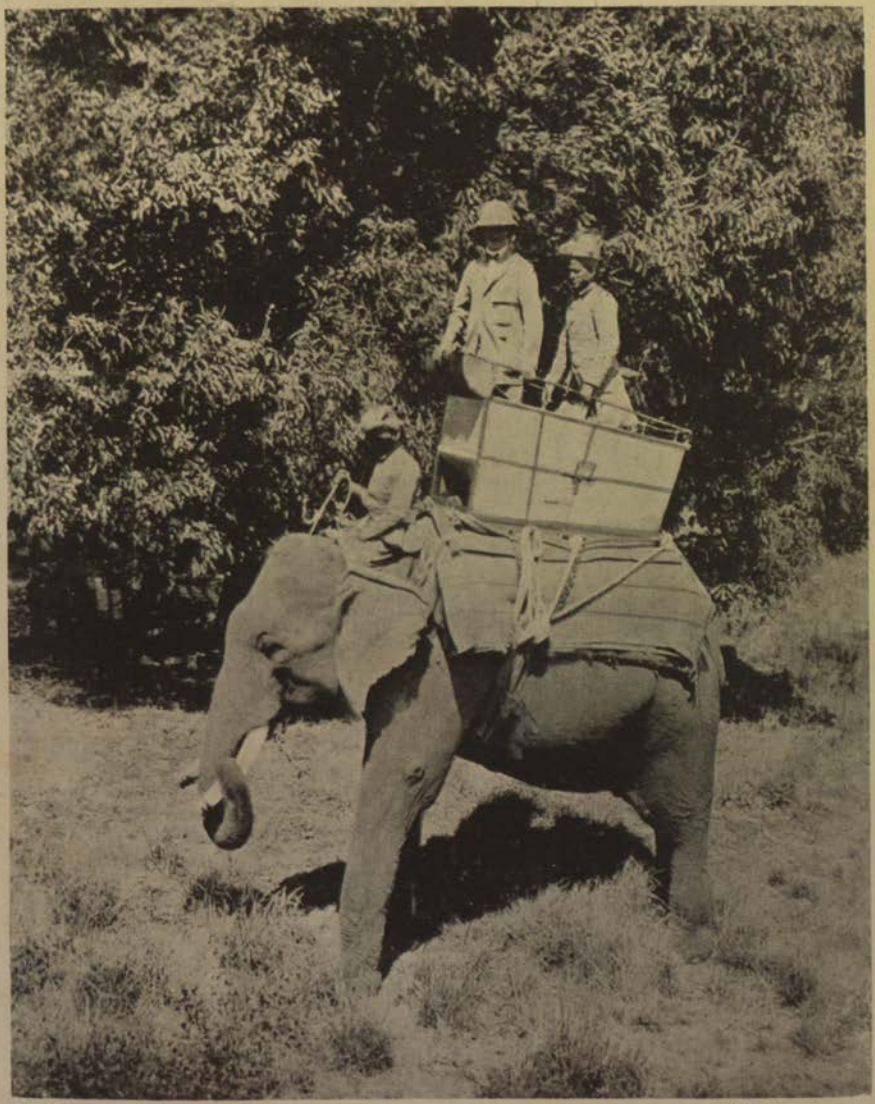
where rain is frequent and brings with it flooded rivers, where such stores and clothes as can be carried become damp and sodden. Foot-slogging, marching light and camping beneath a shelter made of leaves: such things were not for him. Nor, being a man of swift action, with a temperament that loved to strike, not wait, had he that infinite patience which, to the fisherman and the true hunter, makes long days of disappointment seem of small account. He had other ways of expressing himself, as he himself would have been the first to suggest. On the other hand, his nerves were good and he loved the excitement of a shooting-party, more perhaps the party side than the shooting.

As the guest of Sir John Hewett, G.C.S.I., who was then Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, he would often join a party, and although during these expeditions two tigers fell to his rifle, he never failed to provoke the mirth of his host by the amount of equipment he brought with him. He always went out accompanied by two substantial cases of provisions (in which, rumour had it, *pâté de foie gras* and caviare were to be found) and never entered his howdah without two Thermos flasks, a bee net, a Kodak (he was an enthusiastic amateur photographer), an enormous sun-umbrella, and a faithful but half-witted orderly.

In fact, even then the perfect Quartermaster-General!

Miss Lorna Hewett (Mrs. Atkinson) Sir John's daughter, recalls an occasion on which the bee net came in very useful. She writes:

"A leopard had been shot and we were all admiring it, when suddenly we were attacked by a swarm of wild bees. J. S. C. was seen going off into the blue on his elephant surrounded by a cloud of infuriated bees, and



Photo] [*Sir John Hewett.*

Sir John Cowans off on a shooting expedition with his "faithful but half-witted orderly."

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scared out of his life. Hours afterwards he reappeared, very cross, but having shaken off his assailants, only to be attacked immediately by another swarm, which drove him finally from the field of battle, but enabled him for once to make use of one of the many gadgets with which he hung himself."

On another occasion he and Lieutenant-Colonel G. Pleydell-Railston, D.S.O., were guests of the late Maharajah of Kuch Behar for one of his Highness's historic tiger-shoots beyond the borders of Kuch Behar State, in Assam. The country was all grass about ten foot high or more, and beating for tiger or buffalo had to be done by a line of elephants. In the eight days the party was out they got five tiger, five buffalo and one elephant.

§ 4

It may be considered by some that too much space has been devoted to the social side of Cowans's life in India. It is a tenable point of view, but there were several reasons for the course adopted. Moreover, so much has been written about it, so many incorrect and foolish stories told, that it seemed better to deal with the matter more fully than its intrinsic importance might perhaps warrant.

First, and most important, it was characteristic of the man. To ignore or minimise it would be to misrepresent something fundamental in his nature. He undoubtedly found in society, rest, recreation, and it may even be, inspiration, to an extent unusual in most men. In social life he seemed able to display all his faculties, to express almost every side of his nature. Without a trace of shyness or conventionality, he was extremely gregarious, and if, in social intercourse, he received largely

he also gave generously. In fact, in this respect, he was a perfect example of the great law of reciprocity—give and you shall receive.

Moreover, social intercourse and amusements were part of the scheme of life of J. S. C.; one of his ways of getting things done. He never drove his subordinates, he led them; he never worried his superiors, he "gentled" them—to use a horseman's expression. They invariably found themselves acting to please him whether consciously they wanted to or not. Cowans would have made a great ambassador; he could handle the French better than any member of the Army Council, and foreigners never experienced from him the faint, unconscious note of patronage with which so many soldiers treat them.

It is significant that highly-placed men of the world like General Bond, General Moberly (Brigadier-General F. J. Moberly, C.B.) and Sir Denison Ross all consider that Cowans's social qualities were not only of service to him personally, but were of value to his country. The two former even go so far as to express the belief that his social preoccupations were a cloak for serious discussions on Border policy and other important matters. If that were so and if they were designed to lead Russia, the Ameer of Afghanistan and restive Indian rulers to think that we were taking their activities very light-heartedly, then they served their purpose admirably. It would of course be difficult, indeed impossible, to prove that this was really the case. But we can be perfectly certain that never during any period of his career did Cowans allow social or other distractions to interfere with his work.

As we have seen, Lord Kitchener was well acquainted with these social activities and, as has been shown, even

to some extent shared them, and it is quite certain that he never tolerated anything likely to cause inefficiency. He formed the highest opinion of Cowans and gave him his friendship—a gift sparingly bestowed—and Cowans kept those two treasured possessions as long as Lord Kitchener lived.

§ 5

In December 1908 Cowans, then Brigadier-General, [1] assumed command of the Presidency Brigade with Headquarters at Calcutta, a very large area which extended to the British outposts in Tibet

He never forgot an old friend, or failed to try and get around him men whom he knew and in whom he believed. He had an uncanny flair not only for ability, but for the sort of man whom he could personally trust and work with. He, of course, never made the stupid mistake of thinking that because he could not see ability in a man none was there. But he instinctively knew from his earliest years that mere ability is not enough; it must be accompanied by a mutual attraction that makes co-operation not only a possibility but an urgent desire. All his life long he had keen sympathy with young people. He liked them. It would hardly be too much to say that almost all his friends, women and men, were younger than himself. His boyishness, his young heart, opened doors, impelled affection, ensured heartfelt devotion. He was one of the first to realise the ability of that distinguished soldier, Sir Sefton Brancker, who is now Director-General of Civil Aviation.

When they first met, Brancker, an unknown student

[1] This promotion dated from April, 1908.

at the Staff College, and Cowans a big-wig, their liking was mutual. To use General Brancker's words, "we clicked at once."

It was always like that with Cowans. You clicked or you didn't. If you did, you had a life-long friend; if you did not, he forgot your existence.

Sir Sefton writes:

"His was a great personality. He combined simplicity, courage and cheerfulness to an extraordinary degree. He was ambitious, and yet absolutely unself-seeking. He carried out his work conscientiously and thoroughly, and never made the slightest effort to bolster up outside opinion regarding his personal character. He had extraordinarily good judgment and was a very good chooser of men; having selected his men, he put absolute faith in them and gave them wide powers and great responsibilities.

"He was not a deep thinker or a creator of new ideas, but he had a very clear mind which could grasp the salient points of any problem and devise with great rapidity a means of tackling it. When I say his judgment was good, I mean rather an instinctive than a reasoned judgment. I have never seen anyone so quick at perusing a multiplicity of official minutes or a pile of official correspondence; and at summing up at their real value in a few brief sentences, concluding with a clear decision.

"I first met him in India when he had been appointed Director-General of Military Education. I was a student at the Indian Staff College during its first year at Quetta, and in the course of his duties he came down to inspect. He stayed with Tommy Capper, the then Commandant. As I had done rather well during my first year, I was specially asked to dinner to meet him. We made friends at

once and he left on me a strong impression of his quickness of grasp, his energy, his broad-mindedness and his almost boyish exuberance. He was transferred to the command of the Presidency Brigade in Calcutta. On arrival there he found that he wanted a replacement for his Deputy-Assistant Quartermaster-General and, looking down the list of Staff College students available, he selected and asked for me.

" Personally, at first, I was highly indignant, as I was then Brigade-Major of an up-country Brigade where there was plenty of soldiering, plenty of sport, and very little office-work. Calcutta was just the opposite. There was very little soldiering, sport was expensive, and my particular appointment was overwhelmed with office-work. However, a short course as his Staff Officer quite cured me of my dislike of local conditions. He was a perfect General Officer Commanding from the Staff Officer's point of view. He insisted on a high standard of efficiency, but did not worry about details, which he left to his subordinates.

" He took full responsibility, but gave me a free hand and wide powers, a fact which lessened the difficulties of my particular job by about fifty per cent. He worked extremely hard at anything of real importance, but it was difficult to make him face the sordid details of daily routine.

" He was a man whose first object in life appeared to be to help others. He never turned down or obstructed a new idea or a new scheme, but always insisted on its full consideration and its definite encouragement if it proved sound ; and in the same way no man ever appealed to him for help without getting a ready response, and actually this spirit of helpfulness even landed him into

trouble, as was the case in the Cornwallis-West enquiry during the War. His social indiscretions in Calcutta were amazing, but, such washis personality that whatever he did was accepted without demur, even by the households of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief."

Whilst Cowans was in command of the Presidency Brigade he came in touch with Dalai Lama of Tibet, owing to a chain of circumstances which led that dignitary to seek British protection. In consequence of the violation of the Sikkim frontier by Tibetans and of the Dalai Lama's intrigues with Russia, Colonel Younghusband (Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Francis Younghusband, K.C.S.I.) had undertaken his now famous mission to the Forbidden City of Lhassa in 1904, and Tibet had been called upon to pay an indemnity of £500,000 under a treaty to which China's adhesion was obtained. By the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, the sovereign rights of China over Tibet were recognised, and the territorial and administrative integrity of the country was guaranteed. It was further agreed that no official Representative either of Great Britain or Russia should be appointed at Lhassa, and that no commercial concessions should be sought by either power.

In 1908 the final instalment of the indemnity was paid and the Chumbi Valley was evacuated by the British garrison. The Dalai Lama proceeded to Peking, where he was granted Imperial permission to resume the supreme administrative authority, which had been temporarily vested in provisional Governors as a result of the representation of the British Mission. The whole situation, which had previously been one of acute difficulty, seemed to have been settled satisfactorily, and the British

Government raised no objection to the Dalai Lama being reinstated.

In the following year, however, troops were despatched by the Chinese Imperial authorities to deal with a number of recalcitrant Lamas who were giving trouble on the Chinese frontier. The Dalai Lama protested strongly against this action, but his authority was disputed at Lhassa by the representative of the Chinese Government, who summoned the troops to enter the city.

Cowans watched these events with no little concern, which increased when it became known that the Dalai Lama had fled from Lhassa and was making for Darjeeling, which was within the area of the Presidency Brigade. The Chinese troops followed him to the frontier and there seemed every likelihood that the integrity of the Border States, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, would be violated once more. The Chinese Imperial authorities, however, mindful of the warning of the Government of India that the treaty must be respected, called off her troops, but deposed the Dalai Lama. Here China was, of course, on safe ground, and the suppliant had to be informed, as diplomatically as might be, that the Viceroy of India could not intervene on his behalf and had no option but to recognise the Government that actually held the reins of power in Tibet, so long as it was approved by China.

General Brancker gives the following description of Cowans's meeting with the deposed dignitary:

"At the time we were in our summer station at Darjeeling in the Himalayas, and this was the Dalai Lama's first objective. He duly arrived and Jack and I, dressed in our best, went to call on him the next morning.

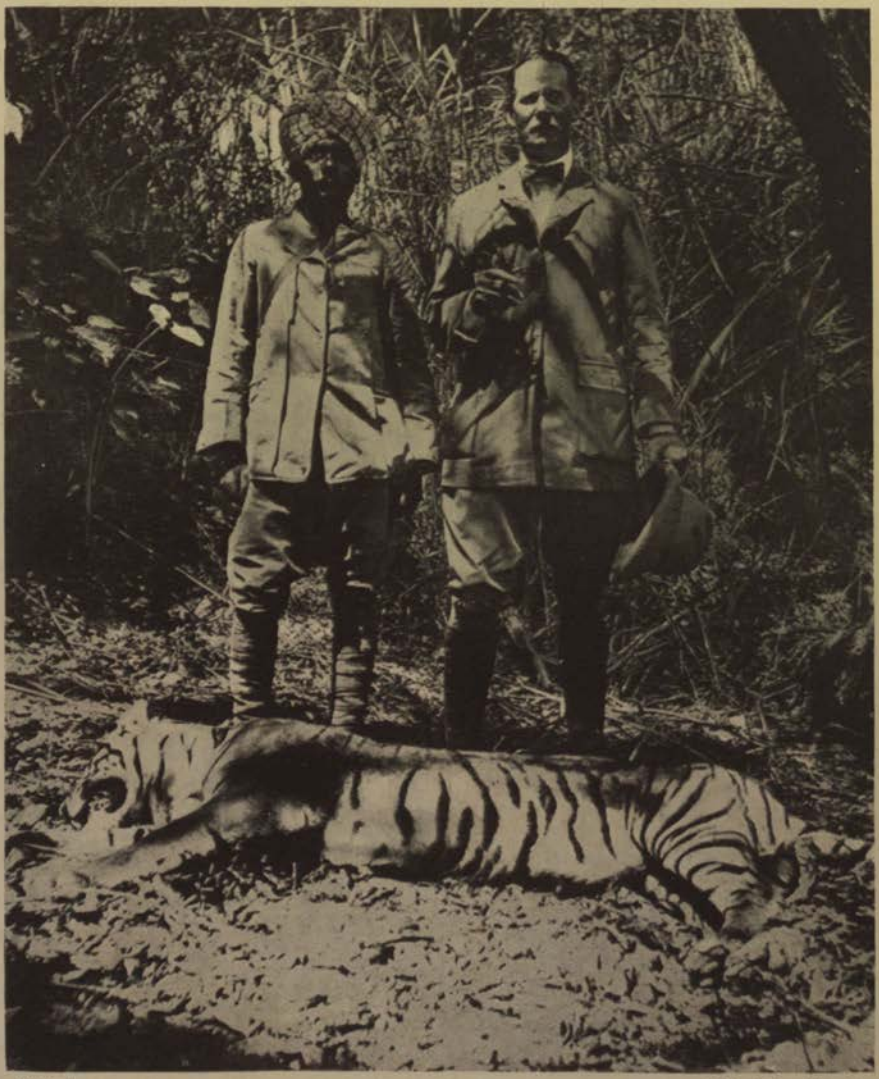
"The Tibetans drink an abominable form of tea made up of rancid fat, soda, and other undesirable

ingredients, and the preliminaries to any official interview are alway asccompanied by drinking cups of this horrific tea. I had travelled in Tibet, could speak the language, and had been forced to drink many cups of the abomination. On arrival at the room of the Dalai Lama, we were duly handed a cup of tea each. Jack had had a late and cheerful night and was not feeling his best, and it was the first time he had met Tibetan tea. He looked at it, smelt it, and I thought, retched slightly. I hastily gulped my cup down, and, whilst our hosts were not looking, gave him my empty cup and took his full one, finishing that in due course. He never forgot this incident, which he always held up as being a proof that not only was I one of the finest Staff Officers in the British Army, but that I also had the strongest stomach.

" During his command we had continued trouble with China and all arrangements were made to send a column into Tibet to reinforce the garrison of our trade post, which was about eighty miles over the frontier. We had the whole plan of campaign drawn up just as Jack Cowans wanted to go on leave. He wrote semi-officially to Scatters Wilson (Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Matthew Wilson, Bt., C.S.I.) and Army Headquarters, asking whether he thought that the situation was sufficiently serious to justify him cancelling his leave. I well remember the reply which came by semi-official post:

" ' My dear old boy, everyone knows that you have never heard a shot fired in anger, except by an angry husband, so I don't think you need forgo your leave.' "

Brigadier-General F. J. Moberly, the brilliant author of the *Official History of the Mesopotamian Campaign*, was then Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General to the Presidency Brigade which was in the Lucknow Division



Photo] *[Sir John Hewett.*

Sir John with his First Tiger.

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commanded by Major-General Bryan Mahon (General the Right Honourable Sir Bryan Mahon, K.C.B.). The Governor of East Bengal and Assam was Sir Lancelot Hare, K.C.S.I. General Moberly's recollections of this period admirably supplement those of General Brancker. He writes:

"I was Chief Staff Officer to General Cowans from December 1908 to April 1910 and learnt much from my association with him, as he was one of the few Generals I have served under, and they have been many, who understood exactly how to utilise his Staff and when to intervene himself.

"Calcutta at that time was a very difficult command. It extended over an enormous area and we had more Volunteer than Regular Corps under our orders. It was necessary to encourage the former, and General Cowans's practical common sense and broad outlook were invaluable assets in a situation in which it was not always easy to get what was required without offending the susceptibilities of the various Volunteers. The 1st of January parade had not, previous to General Cowans's arrival, always met with the approval of Army Headquarters, and he was specially warned that he was expected to effect an improvement.

"The parade was always attended by the Viceroy, Lord Minto, and the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, and the available ground was limited. It was an unpleasant surprise for Cowans to find out that the four or five Volunteer Infantry Corps attending it could not tell him, till their actual arrival on the ground, whether their numbers would be the usual three and four hundred rifles each, or half, or even nearly double that number. As they formed a Brigade by themselves, which *had* to

be put between British and Indian Infantry Brigades, and as the ground was only sufficient to accommodate the usual four hundred rifles or so each, he must have been nervous, though he never showed it, at our first parade, till, just about twenty minutes before the Viceroy's arrival, I got the last Volunteer report, when he saw that we had just three or four yards spare ground left. As it was, he was complimented by Army Headquarters on the way he had carried out the parade.

"Calcutta, he was told on arrival, was quite unsuitable for the usual military manœuvres. The flat, paddy fields, interspersed with patches of jungle, trees, innumerable deep ponds and villages, which patches were only traversed by narrow paths running in every contrary direction, constituted what many soldiers considered almost prohibitive conditions for manœuvres. Cholera and disease were rife in all the many villages, and there was a total lack in the area of any water fit for drinking or that could be made fit. Political unrest existed everywhere and the natives were said to be certain to give trouble if troops manœuvred there.

"General Cowans, however, refused to be discouraged. He considered that the dense patches of inhabited and pond-strewn jungle would give the troops the best of lessons in finding and keeping a proper direction, and he was right, though many of the regimental officers, losing their way time and again, got very wrath and sarcastic. He had water conveyed to the area by tanks on the railway, and we did not have a single case of cholera or other disease due to the insanitary conditions; and he worked through the civil authorities with the natives, who not only consequently gave no trouble and asked for almost no compensation, but turned out in hundreds and

enjoyed the spectacle of the manœuvres, making no complaints at all.

"He was always busy—one of the quickest workers I ever saw; he always seemed to grasp the essentials of a case with most successful results. How he got through all he did, I do not know, as he always had time for everything.

"From what I heard and saw, I should say that Lord and Lady Minto found him very useful. He was constantly at Government House. Lord Kitchener liked and trusted him. While it was useful to his Brigade that he should be closely in touch with these high authorities, they made, as I know, many demands on his time; and although he told me some things on which he was consulted, he did so in confidence, and at this interval of time and in my ignorance of the complete situation on all sides, I should be wrong to write of things I could only suspect, namely, that his advice was often asked, if not followed, on many purely political matters."

§ 6

While in Calcutta J. S. C.'s social activities were as great as at Simla but, in a large city, did not attract so much attention. That they were at all times correct, even if lively and amusing, is proved by the friendship of both the Viceroy and Lady Minto, both of whom had ample opportunities of knowing the more serious side of his work.

Among the many horse stories told about—or against—him is one relating that while at Calcutta he had a colossal charger which he handed over to Miss Lorna Hewett, asking her to "ride it about among the trams" and

so break it in for him. In reality the only remarkable thing about the horse was its size, but after J. S. C. had ridden it on the occasion of the Viceroy's New Year's Day Parade and had had endless trouble, he complained that, so far from Miss Hewett breaking the animal in, she had only "taught it to shy."

General Brancker says that Lord Kitchener had a big black horse which J. S. C. always declared the Commander-in-Chief took the precaution of having doped before parades! K. insisted it was just the mount for Cowans and always wanted to sell it to him. When K. left India he had the horse sent to Cowans who, however, never got to like it.

Between the Simla and Calcutta periods Cowans, having obtained five months' leave, paid a visit to China and Japan. He returned laden with crates of Japanese bronzes, china and so on. Lord Kitchener, as is well known, was a great collector of china—a connoisseur—which Cowans, of course, was not. It pleased J. S. C., however, to declare that K. was jealous of his collection, had in fact stolen all his best pieces, and that he found it necessary to hide what was left when he expected a visit from the Commander-in-Chief.

One of the many good stories of the Calcutta period rescued from oblivion is that of a well-known and popular young subaltern whose disposition was somewhat amorous, and the announcement of whose engagement to an equally well known and popular young lady was hourly expected. Cowans, when asked whether he had seen him lately, replied, "Seen him! I should just think so! I saw him just now on the Mall making nesting noises and hopping about with a twig in his mouth."

During his command the questions of volunteering in

India was a burning one. In view of what has happened since, his views are of interest. He stated: " I see nothing for it but compulsory service for every white man whether he be English, French, German or anything else, and this applies equally to Parsees and Eurasians."

The views of Cowans expressed by General Malleson, General Bond and General Brancker were those of experienced Staff Officers who were even then in a position of intimacy and responsibility, and therefore enabled to form a correct judgment. Nevertheless the aide-de-camp is a privileged observer and is from his more intimate if less responsible point of view quite likely to form a shrewd opinion of his Chief.

From this standpoint the following note by Colonel G. Pleydell-Railston, has special value.

" I had the honour of being A.D.C. to General Sir John Cowans when he commanded the Presidency Brigade, Calcutta, and during that time I had the privilege of getting to know him very well. As a Chief, he was kind and considerate to a degree, having that wonderful aptitude for getting through an enormous amount of work in the minimum time. This gift was early in his career a prominent factor, as he passed out of the Staff College top, having, it has been said, burned the minimum amount of midnight oil in study.

" He would often deal with a mass of correspondence in a few minutes, skimming through it and putting his finger on all the important points, which would have taken most men an hour or so to digest.

" He was a most perfect host, looking into every minute detail for the comfort and convenience of his guests. A very clever and witty talker on any subject, he had always the spirits and heart of a school-boy, which

were all the more remarkable as he never took any exercise at all, and very rarely went to bed before 3 a.m. He had the widest and largest correspondence of anyone I know. He always kept his friends, and never forgot a friend or acquaintance. He used to write a dozen or more personal letters every night when the rest of his house had gone to bed.

"He played no outdoor games, was not fond of riding, but enjoyed shooting small or big game.

"He was the most delightful companion anyone could wish for in any way, and had travelled extensively."

This tribute, supplemented by the following from another of his aides-de-camp, gives a good all-round view of J. S. C. as he affected the various ages and types of men who came closely into contact with him during the only period in his career when he was actually in command of troops:

"I knew General Cowans well, in fact was A.D.C. to him during the winter of 1908-9, when he commanded the Presidency Brigade (now District) with Headquarters at Calcutta.

"Calcutta, at the period of which I write, was the capital of India, and Headquarters of the Government, Army, and Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal throughout the winter months. The Military District which J. S. C. commanded comprised Bengal, Behar and Assam, a vast area—and a very mixed command. So far as I can remember there were stationed in the command two Battalions of British Infantry and about five Battalions of Indian Infantry, Coast Defence Artillery for the Hugli, an Indian Cavalry Regiment and two Batteries Royal Field Artillery, and the usual Departmental

Troops, in addition to all the Volunteer units in the District.

"Cowans lived over one of the gates at Fort William, and Kitchener lived over the next gate, so that both K. and his Staff were constantly in our house and J. S. C. a constant visitor at theirs.

"The social side of Cowans's character had, I feel sure, a great deal to do with his selection for this appointment, which at that time required not only a man of great tact and ability, but also one who was well known. J. S. C. filled the bill—and there were few visitors of interest in the Military, Official or Service world who were not entertained by him. He was one of the most generous people that I have ever met, and was always happiest and at his best when acting as host. I have no doubt that this trait in his character was largely the cause of the financial muddle of his affairs when he died. I do not think that he sought popularity, but it came to him naturally. If, however, he had any weakness or failing I would describe it as a weakness in being unable either to refuse a favour or to lend his assistance to any who asked it, and this was taken undue advantage of at times.

"As a conversationalist he was brilliant, and some of the most interesting evenings of my life have been spent listening to him talking after dinner, especially if he had been entertaining eminent men. His versatile character also enabled him to adapt himself exactly to his company, so that he was equally at home with a young frivolous party or a party of men of affairs. We had, of course, a great deal of touring to do, and J. S. C.'s great charm of manner undoubtedly stood him in good stead when dealing with the Volunteers in India, and was of much use

to him when he became Director-General of the Territorial Force a few years later.

" J. S. C. was neither a great shikari nor keen games player during the time I knew him, nor do I think he ever had much time to devote to either. He went on one tiger-shoot during the years I am speaking of, but as far as I remember came back without the tiger. I did not accompany him on this occasion, as I was pig-sticking elsewhere. Nor did I consider him a good horseman. He attended the races regularly in Calcutta, but this was a social obligation required from everyone who was anyone, and to the best of my belief he practically did not bet, and had little knowledge of form or weight.

" I have often heard J. S. C. criticised for devoting too much of his time to the social affairs of life. Such a criticism is unfair, for he never allowed anything to interfere with his work and duties. Such critics entirely fail to realise the great brain power of the man and the rapidity with which he could grasp the crucial point, and perhaps his only fault was that he could not tolerate stupidity combined with a slow argumentative brain.

" I have often known him sit up late at night playing bridge, or else perhaps go to a dance, when one knew that there were important papers waiting for him to deal with. But I have never known him fail to produce those papers fully and completely dealt with by breakfast-time next morning. When and how he got through his work was a marvel to all of us connected with him. Like all clever men, he was not above asking advice from others, and he knew the right person to apply to for such advice. Even from a junior officer like myself he would frequently ask an opinion, and one always felt flattered when the course one suggested was adopted. And by discussing

affairs with us in this way he was continually teaching his subordinates.

"I remember a very shrewd Calcutta business man remarking to me on the number of Cowans's decorations. I think he had six, at a time when officers were not so covered with ribbon as they are to-day. None of these was a war medal and it was this fact that so impressed my friend, as he considered that they must all have been earned by brain power. Perhaps they were, but two, if not three, were Coronation or Durbar medals."

There can be no doubt but that Cowans was eminently fitted by nature to command men in the field. He had in a remarkable degree the gift of leadership, and possessed all the qualities necessary to enable him to reach a lofty position as a fighting soldier. There can also be no doubt but that he realised this himself, and the knowledge must often have galled him in spite of the many compensations he received for being deprived of the privilege of seeing active service in the field. General Spencer Ewart, who had been with him at Sandhurst, at the Staff College, and was Adjutant-General from 1912 to 1914, it will be remembered, holds this view.

He formed it as far back as their Staff College days together in 1890, and if he had then been asked to say in what direction Cowans was most likely to succeed he would have said as a leader of men. The South African War, as has been seen, failed to give him his chance, and when the European War came it was too late.

With the exception of the very brief period when he was with the Third Battalion of the Rifle Brigade at Umballa in 1898, he never found himself in charge of men till he commanded the Presidency Brigade in 1908.

A short fifteen months was the only time in his career

during which he held the post of an executive officer of General rank. It was far too brief a period in which to test his value as a Commander and leader of men ; more especially in India, where no man can hope to leave any real impression unless he gives his whole life to the country. Moreover, he was too directly under the great shadow of Lord Kitchener to have hoped to make an impression of his own.

There is a marked tendency in the Army to undervalue men who have held no command in the field, and the General Staff Officer is apt to look down on his colleagues on the Administrative Staff. It is tacitly assumed that he does not hold a command or is not a General Staff Officer because he is somehow inferior in intellect or capacity. This silly convention has done much harm to the Army by driving men to seek commands in the field when they were not by nature or training fitted for such a task : it has done even more harm, insidiously, by keeping off the Administrative Staff men whose services there have all too often been flagrantly needed. Any old duffer, or any stupid old dug-out, it was assumed, was good enough for the most important post so long as it was not in the field or on the General Staff !

From the point of view of convenience there may be much to be said for dividing the Staff into grades as is done at present ; but from the point of view of efficiency and of securing the square peg for the square hole there can be no doubt as to the evil of any system that seems to make one Staff Officer less useful or less necessary than another.

Many soldiers and some civilians will dismiss these observations as nonsense. Unfortunately they are not.

There is ample evidence, positive and negative, that some soldiers who, one would have thought, might well have jumped at an opportunity of paying tribute to the wonderful work accomplished by Cowans, have shown a coy reluctance to share with him either honour or glory. Many of them have had successes ; a few have had great success, though, possibly, not quite so great as they have brought themselves to believe or can be certain of history ratifying ; and yet they have been content to beg to be excused from expressing an opinion or, even more ungenerous, have damned with faint praise the man and the Department, without the work of which they could have accomplished nothing. Men, lucky enough (and often it was just luck) to hold high command in the field, have allowed themselves the feeling that they could look down on others less fortunate, and this in spite of the obvious fact that during the European War a General Headquarters, or even an Army or Corps Headquarters, was in reality very little more dangerous, and very little less comfortable, than an office stool at home.

Cowans was a man who would feel this sort of thing keenly, and no doubt he had opportunities of doing so throughout his career.

It is perhaps too much to say on the available evidence that he would have made as great a success as any of them in the field ; but it is not too much to claim that he had all the necessary qualities in a marked degree, and this he must himself have known quite well.

India did not give him time or opportunity to prove it completely, but it was sufficient to show that, given the chance, the ability was there.

Some, who should have known better, belittled him because he wore no Service medals. To them and their

like the following story may convey a lesson, if not a rebuke.

Someone, in the presence of Sir Evelyn Wood, made a thoughtless remark about Cowans being selected for an appointment although he had never seen a shot fired on Service. Sir Evelyn very quietly said:

"When I see a man who is covered with medals selected for an appointment, it conveys nothing to me. He may be a good man or he may not. But when I see a man selected who has not been so fortunate as to see Service, I know that he must be a jolly good man."

After all Von Moltke never commanded any formation larger than a Company; yet he is recognised as amongst the greatest soldiers in history, and one from whom every man who would be a soldier must learn.

It is not given to every soldier to be like Napoleon, equally great in organising a battle and in leading men to victory. It is not claimed for Cowans that he was a great thinking soldier in the sense that it is claimed for men like Coleridge Grove, Brackenbury and Maurice. But he was a born leader of men, and in that capacity would undoubtedly have achieved a great career.

An incident that occurred in January, 1910, is worth recording, if only to show what a good General Staff Officer he would have made had not circumstances conspired to make him specialise in administrative work.

His Brigade consisted of a Battalion of the West Kents and the Rifle Brigade, and two Sepoy Battalions, the West Kents being temporarily up in the hills for training. Several Sepoys got into trouble for attempted mutiny, were court-martialled, sentenced to transportation and lodged in Alipur Jail. The two Sepoy Battalions were seething with resentment which communicated itself

to the civilian population in Calcutta, and it was rumoured that the Sepoys planned to storm the jail and rescue their comrades.

Cowans at once took firm measures. A Company of the Rifle Brigade was detailed as a standing picquet with orders to sleep in their boots, and the officer in command was instructed that in the event of trouble a pre-arranged alarm would be given, on which he was to proceed to the jail and there act as he thought fit—but effectively. A very characteristic Cowans touch.

Gradually it was discovered that the attack was fixed for a particular date. The Rifle Brigade was given secret orders to pitch a camp; Cowans brought the other white Battalion down in the night with the utmost secrecy; sunrise saw them camped outside the fort and —there was no mutiny or attempted rescue. The moral effect of this move on the disaffected Sepoy Battalions was instantaneous. In fact it was a very complete and brilliant piece of Staff work.

On March 21, 1910, Cowans had become a Major-General, and in July he left India on four months' leave for England, little knowing that his foreign service was at an end. A personal recollection from Mr. E. J. Watts will serve to describe the journey and illustrate another of his characteristics which was the ability to establish happy, cheery intimacies wherever he went. Mr. Watts says:

"I met Sir John Cowans in Japan and, as we were both returning to England, we made the journey together—across the Pacific to Vancouver, then by the C.P.R. to Montreal and thence to Liverpool. As we became the best of friends, I had ample time to appreciate his sterling qualities and his lovableness, if one may apply such a feminine term to such a typical man's man.

"We invariably spent the last half hour of each day in the smoking-room—this was before the days of Prohibition—and there was one other *regular* occupant with whom we occasionally had a drink; he being a retired Scottish Major with an unquenchable thirst, and upon whom whiskey had seemingly no effect, save that his left eye used to get extremely bloodshot and its action became apparently independent of the other.

"The Major was my table companion in the dining saloon, whilst Sir John sat facing us at a side table. One morning at breakfast, after a particularly thirsty 'night before,' I saw Sir John busily sketching or writing on the back of a menu card, and as he smiled whimsically at me I gathered it had something to do with either myself or my neighbour. Presently he called his table steward and sent the menu across on a tray. He had roughly outlined in pencil an eye, an enormous eye, the centre of which was composed of a slice of beet-root, super-imposed with a smaller concentric slice of lemon, with a dab of mustard arranged a trifle off centre. This work of art bore the words 'The Major's Eye,' and amidst my hilarious confusion I managed to upset the whole business on the floor without the Major being any the wiser.

"He was a great Englishman whom I shall always be proud to have known under such delightfully intimate circumstances."

We cannot more fittingly close the account of Cowans's career in India than by quoting the words of his Divisional Commander, Sir Bryan Mahon, who says:

"During the time he served under me in India in command of the Calcutta Brigade, he, if possible, increased his reputation as a soldier and a first-class administrator. He was popular with everyone, both civil and military."

Photo by] *[Lora Francis Scott.*

Sir Archibald Hunter, Sir John Cowans, Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and the Hon. Mrs. Adam outside Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's bungalow at Quetta.

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As has been shown, Cowans's four years in India saw much good work accomplished. Nevertheless, it was but the preparation for the greater work to come. Throughout his career every new post he held was a step towards the peak of his ambitions. Never once did he slip back, or have to make up lost ground. Each stage of his journey gave him fresh experience, rendered him more fitted for the work which lay ahead. It was as if destiny were deliberately setting herself to perfect her instrument for the task she had in store. And when he reached England in the autumn of 1910, even he did not realise that the hour of his great test was approaching.

CHAPTER V

1910—1912

Offered by Lord Haldane Director-Generalship of Territorial Force—
—Cowans accepts—Returns to India to hand over Presidency Brigade—Lord Haldane's reorganisation of the Second Line—Position of the Militia, Volunteers and Yeomanry in 1907—The establishment of the Territorial Force—Duties of the County Associations—The Territorial Department at the War Office—Cowans the man to make Terriers wag their tails—His initial difficulties—The Force's hostile critics—He tours the country—The personal factor—His appeal to employers—The Associations find him sympathetic—His efforts to make camps attractive—Consolidates the good will of the Lords Lieutenant—An appreciation from Lord Dartmouth—Making the scheme work smoothly—Suggests that women might help recruiting—A favourite rhyme—Unsatisfactory arrangements for horse mobilisation —Cowans tackles the problem—Masters the paper horse—Result of two years' work.

In October, 1910, Cowans, on leave from India, was at Evian in France when he was summoned to England by Mr. Haldane (the Viscount Haldane of Cloan, K.T.), the Secretary of State for War, and offered the post of Director-General of the Territorial Force, then in the third year of its existence.

For some time he had been anxious for a home appointment, partly because India was trying his health but still more because he had for some time realised

that war with Germany was only a question of time, and was shrewd enough to know that he had every hope of succeeding to the appointment of Quartermaster-General if he were on the spot when the vacancy occurred. Therefore, although he knew the difficulties that lay before him —perhaps because of them—he accepted Lord Haldane's offer and returned to India immediately to hand over the command of the Presidency Brigade and to settle up his private affairs. He was succeeded by General Fanshawe (Major-General Sir Hew Dalrymple Fanshawe, K.C.M.G.), who had previously commanded the Second Cavalry Brigade at Canterbury.

Before discussing Cowans's work as Director-General of the Territorial Force, it is necessary to examine briefly the circumstances which led to the reorganisation of the Second Line.

When Lord Haldane became Secretary of State for War at the end of 1905, he found himself in no easy position. As he declared in a speech made in the House of Commons on March 9, 1906, [1] the path was spread with difficulties. He admitted that the army expenditure had reached enormous figures (though they would scarcely be considered enormous now), having risen from £18,000,000 in 1896 to £30,000,000 in 1906. The country, therefore, was in no mood for fresh expenditure on the Auxiliary Forces, and yet it was of the utmost importance that those forces should be reconstructed on sounder lines.

Lord Haldane accepted the limitations within which his Government was pledged to work, and he stated:

"We do not propose to increase by a penny the

[1] This and other speeches on the Army have been collected and are published by T. Fisher Unwin under the title *Army Reform*.

expenditure on the Auxiliary Forces, which has already grown to portentous dimensions, and I hope there is room for economy. But we want to get out of the three or four millions spent on the Auxiliary Forces something very substantial in this form, which will enable us to diminish the cost of the Regulars, something to bring the Army nearer the people, to make the people more content with the Army than they are at the present time."

It is necessary to emphasise the financial limitations, since their results were the principal obstacles which Cowans encountered when he became Director-General.

That, too, was Lord Haldane's main difficulty. There was no money to spare, yet reorganisation was essential. The Militia, the oldest force in the country, with great traditions and an honourable history, had become effete. As Lord Lansdowne said, it had been plundered at one end by the Line and encroached at the other by the Volunteers, which had superseded it as a Home Defence Force. It had no cavalry, no artillery, no administrative services, and was therefore unfitted to take the field in time of war, and, being unable to operate as an independent force, could be used only to supplement regular units. Moreover, owing to its feeding the line Battalions, it was 37,000 below the strength of its 131,000 establishment, although it cost the country £2,000,000 a year.

The Volunteers cost very nearly as much, and were also greatly below strength. Some of the Brigades were composed of three Battalions, some of five, some of seven, while the Battalions themselves might have five Companies or they might have twelve. There was no artillery, no Army Service Corps, and no formation higher than that of a Brigade, and there was no Staff. The result was chaos. Like the Militia, the Volunteers had no

organisation, and Lord Haldane described them as "the most confused thing in the British Constitution," adding that they were paid in twenty-two different ways.

The Yeomanry, which formed part of the third line with the Volunteers, were in a better position, and as a force had a greater military value, but they had no war organisation, and, as Lord Haldane said, "If we came to war, nobody would quite know where to put them."

"No army is worth anything," declared his Lordship, in his third Parliamentary speech on Army Reform,[1] "which is not ready to take the field." He showed that the whole Army was not ready. The organisation had been a triple one. The first line, the Regular Army, was professional; the second line, the Militia, was semi-professional; the third line, the Volunteers, was voluntary. Each had been starved by the others. The first line was full of gaps, the second line was decadent because it was not possible to find either enough men or enough money, and the third was totally disorganised because the military talent had flowed so largely into the other lines. Instead of a homogeneous organisation there was a confused mass of troops coming under the three heads, but with no place in a definite military scheme.

Lord Haldane's changes meant an organisation in two lines instead of three. The Regular Army was brought up to six full Divisions and four cavalry Brigades, with provision for the necessary Army Reserve, into which the old Militia passed in 1908, to supply wastage in time of war. As Lord Haldane said, the Regular Army was small in quantity because it had to operate in the main across the seas, and for that very reason high in quality.

[1] Delivered on February 22, 1907.

It was provided with transport, munitions, stores, medical and other equipment, so that it was prepared and ready instantly to form a striking force when the call should come.

Behind this professional Army was established a second line "resting in the nation itself, slumbering in times of peace, although prepared to be called upon in times of supreme national emergency; but there when it is wanted for the defence of our shores and for the expansion and support of the Army abroad."

In this connection it may be of interest to recall Wellington's words, when, in his last speech in the House of Lords, he supported the bill of 1852 for the reorganisation of the Militia, which had ceased to exist except in name after the peace of 1815:

"I say, my Lords, that however much I admire highly-disciplined troops, and most especially British disciplined troops, I tell you you must not suppose that others cannot become so too; and no doubt if you begin with the formation of militia corps under this Act of Parliament, they will in time become what their predecessors in the militia were; and if ever they do become what their predecessors in the militia were, you may rely on it they will perform all the services they may be required to perform. My Lords, I recommend you to adopt this measure as the commencement of a completion of a peace establishment. It will give you a constitutional force: it may not be at first, or for some time, everything we could desire, but by degrees it will become what you want, an efficient auxiliary force to the regular army."[1]

For his auxiliary force Lord Haldane based his plans on the assumption that Great Britain differed from the

[1] Maxwell's *Life of Wellington*, ii., p. 385.

Continental Powers in the fact that, for the forces on which she had to depend to come to her aid in case of war and expand the Regular Army, there would be time for preparation, whereas a Continental Power might be fighting a few days after mobilisation, which made it essential that the expansive power should be highly trained and ready to take the field at once. To-day criticisms of this assumption naturally suggest themselves, but it is easy to be wise after the event. In 1907, even those who prophesied a European War did not foresee that the assumption applied by the War Minister to the Continental Powers would be applied perforce to Great Britain, and that the British Army itself would be fighting with its back to the wall within a few days of mobilisation, even as the armies of France and Germany.

Nor did Lord Haldane himself think lightly of the possibilities of war, for he maintained:

"If it is necessary to have a large Army at any time—as it may be necessary, for who can say when we may not be threatened—then we ought to have the earliest possible means of increasing our Army."

For this reason he remoulded the Auxiliary Forces with the object that they might be prepared for war as completely and as thoroughly as the first line.

"If we are to have a real second line, we should be in earnest about it," he said, and he introduced a system under which a period of training was divided into two parts, one to be elementary and elastic, and made easy for everybody according to his circumstances; the other reserved for the period after hostilities had broken out. "In order to train a very large number of men in a thorough fashion you require the influence of some great national impulse. Such an impulse would come if

hostilities had broken out and the country was in real jeopardy." Here Lord Haldane showed himself a true prophet, and displayed a deep insight into the psychology of the British nation, and in the meantime he founded his scheme on the principle that, as Lord French said, " It was the bounden duty of every young man to take part in his country's defence."

§ 2

The reorganised second line, the Territorial Force, consisted of fourteen self-contained Infantry Divisions, each commanded by a Major-General of the Regular Army, and having its proper proportion of all arms and its necessary complement of administrative services, while the Yeomanry gave an equivalent of fourteen Brigades of cavalry. The total establishment was 300,000, and its annual cost to the country was just under £3,000,000 —£1,500,000 less than the cost of the Auxiliary Forces under the old organisation.

Men enlisted for four years, and the period of annual training was between eight and fifteen days, or eighteen days in the case of the Yeomanry. The Force, intended for service in the United Kingdom, was, in the event of an outbreak of hostilities, to be embodied for six months war training. And Lord Haldane, once more prophetic, declared his belief that at the end of that time the men would be ready to say : " We wish to go abroad and take our part in the theatre of war, to fight in the interests of the nation and for the defence of the Empire." " It might be," he added, " that they would not only go in their Battalions, but in their Brigades, and even in Divisions." This is exactly what did happen.

The Force was organised on the county basis, which has always been considered the most convenient administrative area in this country, and for his purpose Lord Haldane introduced a new piece of machinery, the County Associations, with which Cowans, when the time came, had so much to do.

The principle of the County Association was the devolution on sound lines of military administration to local units, for Lord Haldane saw the necessity of allowing the county the power of organising itself and controlling its own affairs. The President of each Association was the Lord-Lieutenant of the county, not only because, although shorn of many of his old military functions, he still remained the military representative of the Crown in the county, but because he was the link with the great landowners, and it was from the landowners that Lord Haldane hoped to get much help and thus effect great saving to the public in the new organisation. "I should like to see the country people getting something to do," said his Lordship, rallying the House, "I should like to see the Lieutenants, and perhaps the Deputy-Lieutenants, earning their uniform."

The Associations were in reality military committees composed of the Lord Lieutenant and the Commanding Officers of Territorial units.

The functions of the Associations were purely administrative. They had nothing to do with training, which was left entirely to the officers directly responsible, but, within the limits of their own counties, they dealt with the raising of the force and recruiting, the finding of clothing, equipment, supplies and weapons, and the general provision of the necessities for a campaign, while the spending of the money furnished by the War Office was entirely in

their hands. In short, the County Associations looked after the business side of the affairs of the Second Line.

Besides this, however, they were required to ascertain the military resources and capabilities of the county, and they corresponded direct with the Director-General's Department at the War Office. When the Force was called out for training, or embodied, however, it passed automatically under the administrative jurisdiction of the Commander-in-Chief, and thus the main object of the Associations was to hand over efficient units for training, and, once they were handed over, to become responsible for the welfare of the wives and children of the men, and to see that those who were entitled to allowances received them.

The strength of the Territorial Force lay in the fact that, although it superseded the Militia and the Volunteers, it superseded them, as Lord Haldane said, [1] "by taking what was living in them and absorbing it."

In short, whereas he had found the military forces organised in three lines without well-defined relations towards each other, the Third Line, indeed, without any relations to the first two, Lord Haldane, with the assistance of the newly-formed General Staff, introduced an organisation in two lines, both with functions clearly defined, but interdependent. The Territorial Army became a force designed for war, with machinery for speedy mobilisation and expansion. In organisation and discipline it resembled the old Militia, in training conditions the Volunteers. Its duties were to support the Regular Army by supplying garrisons, repelling raids, and providing voluntary units for the Expeditionary Force, should need arise, in time of war. Besides this it had,

[1] Introduction to Harold Baker's *The Territorial Force.*

as Mr. Harold Baker remarks, the function of creating a sense of internal security which might prevent a recurrence of the frequent military and commercial panics of the past.[1]

§ 3

On paper, at least, Lord Haldane's scheme was a vast improvement on the old organisation. It remained to make it so in practice. Naturally, its author believed in it and was enthusiastic about it. But his enthusiasm was not altogether shared by his colleagues in the Cabinet, for few members of the Government ever referred to it, and not one supported it warmly; moreover, as time went on, the Force came to have many opponents, both political and military.

It was represented at the War Office by a special department, the head of which was the Director-General. The department came directly under the Civil Member of the Army Council. It was further represented by an Advisory Council, which consisted of a limited number of Lords-Lieutenant, as Presidents of County Associations, Commanding Officers of the Territorial Force, and Regular officers. Lord Haldane, as Secretary of State for War, was the Chairman and Cowans became his deputy.

The appointment of Director-General was the outcome of the new system of Army Inspectorships—the others being the Inspector-General of the Forces and the Inspector-General of the Overseas Forces.

Previously, the Volunteers had also had a Director-General, though this officer had little power, and the Force was in reality administered by the War Office.

[1] *The Territorial Force*, p. 73.

Under Lord Haldane's scheme, however, it was decided to give the Territorial Force more independence, and in consequence the new Director-General was much more powerful than the former Director-General of Auxiliary Forces. He was virtually independent, controlled his own department, and was responsible for his own Gazettes which he sent to the Adjutant-General for publication.

The appointment had been held previously by General Sir Henry Mackinnon, G.C.B. In the autumn of 1910 General Mackinnon was given the Western Command, and Lord Haldane offered the vacancy to General Spencer Ewart, who accepted it. His appointment was announced, but almost immediately afterwards General Ewart was given the option of the Adjutant-Generalship, which had just fallen vacant, and as it was the more important post, naturally he accepted it. In these circumstances, Lord Haldane discussed the question of his successor with several eminent soldiers, one of whom was Lord Nicholson.[1] Lord Nicholson had formed a high opinion of Cowans's ability and, knowing that he was anxious to obtain an appointment in England, recommended him to Lord Haldane as a suitable man to put in charge of the Territorial Force. At this time Lord Haldane knew nothing of Cowans, but he needed a man with energy and tact, as he himself has described it, " to round off the corners of the scheme and to tie up loose ends," and accordingly he acted on Lord Nicholson's advice, and selected Cowans for the post.

The suitability of the appointment being on one occasion under discussion in the Naval and Military Club, a distinguished soldier said, " Jack always loved Terriers. Why, he is just the man ; he could teach a

[1] Field-Marshal Lord Nicholson, G.C.B., died 1918.

jackass card-tricks, and if he can't make Terriers wag their tails no one can ! "

This was exactly what the Territorial Force needed —someone to make it wag its tail. Since its inception it had enlisted 270,000 men—20,000 more than Lord Haldane had hoped for—yet it had been subjected to considerable hostile criticism, and it had its detractors in certain senior officers of the Regular Army who did not believe in the scheme, and laughed at the idea of a fortnight's training a year being of any real value, even to a citizen army. It had also encountered some hostility from the old Volunteer and Militia element which disliked the change. Moreover, in the campaign for Compulsory Service, the Press had tended to upset the public mind and give it the view that Lord Roberts considered the Territorial Force useless, whereas he was in reality only trying to carry the scheme for national defence further by appealing for conscription, which he considered as essential to the safety of the country ; he did not criticise the Territorial Force as an organisation, but felt that it did not go far enough.

At the same time the Director-General more than once reported to the Secretary of State that the National Service campaign periodically affected recruiting for the New Force. The Committee of Imperial Defence took the matter so seriously that they appointed a sub-committee to hear Lord Roberts and his supporters at length. After full consideration they dissented from his proposals. It was not open to the Government to do all they ought, they therefore chose the sensible course of doing what they could. The new Force undoubtedly suffered to some extent from the absence of Lord Kitchener's overt approval and support. His experiences in the French

Regular Army in 1870–71 led him to consider imperfectly-trained troops as, at best, of small value and, at worst, as dangerous. He foresaw no possibility of an attacking Power giving him time for them to be trained after the outbreak of war.

Then the finance question had been difficult, for in many cases the grants made by the War Office were not enough. The ideal behind the scheme was that of decentralisation by means of the County Association, but in decentralisation on a large scale there is always the danger of lack of cohesion and co-operation—the very defects the Volunteers had suffered from in the old days. There was nothing wrong with the scheme, and there was nothing wrong with the men, but what the Force needed was someone who would encourage instead of criticising, make others enthusiastic about it and, by his own dominant personality, bind it together as a living whole.

Cowans's personal characteristics, no less than his military qualifications, were peculiarly suited to this task. Everything he undertook, he undertook wholeheartedly. He was fond of quoting the saying: "First of all make up your mind whether a thing is worth doing, and then do it with all your might." Besides bringing his unbounded energy to his task, he brought his magnetic personality and the power of communicating to others his own enthusiasm.

When he took over the appointment, although he had some practical experience of volunteers in India, he knew little about the Territorials or their aspirations—aspirations which had so often been laughed at that even the keenest had become touchy and difficult to approach. But he realised at once that if he was going

to do what Lord Haldane had brought him from India to do, his only hope was to get into personal relationship with those concerned, rather than sit in a chair at the War Office and draft minutes and memoranda.

Lord Haldane agreed with this view, and since he wished to have at the War Office someone who had an intimate knowledge of the working of the machinery of the Force until Cowans got well into the saddle, General Fry (His Excellency Major-General Sir William Fry, K.C.V.O., now Governor of the Isle of Man), who was then commanding the East Lancashire Division, was temporarily appointed Deputy Director-General, the official reason announced being that there might be no delay in carrying out the routine work at Headquarters. This left Cowans free to make an extended tour of the country with the object of putting into practice his plan of obtaining an insight into local conditions and conferring with the authorities on the spot.

He visited drill halls and inspected the men, received deputations from the County Associations and made frequent speeches, doing his best to check the spreading of reports that the Force had been a failure, and making a special appeal to employers of labour to assist in every way they could by being sympathetic to the scheme and granting all possible facilities to their men to attend training. Every night he would speak somewhere, with the object of stimulating public interest in the scheme and, of necessity, had to use figures a great deal. He could not read without his glasses, and, on one occasion, when he was addressing a large meeting, his servant forgot to put them in his despatch-box, so that he arrived at the hall with all his notes and figures, but without the means to read them. It says much for the grasp he had

already obtained of the whole intricate subject that he was able to tell a friend next day, with evident relief, that he had been able to quote everything he had intended to, without making any reference to his notes.

He did not spare himself, and at no time in the whole of his career did he work harder than in those first few months of his new apointment; so much so that soon after his return to the War Office he was on the verge of a collapse and his doctor was seeing him three times a day.

At this time his Assistant Director was Colonel Stanley Maude (afterwards Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude, K.C.B.) who had been given the appointment in General Mackinnon's time. The two men were in many ways unlike in character, and the following quotation from Sir Charles Callwell's brilliant *Life of Sir Stanley Maude*, shows how Cowans impressed his subordinate:

"The subject of this memoir was now to serve under a chief who brought with him to the War Office a genius for organisation that was unvitiated by any overpowering enthusiasm for the desk. To a man like Maude, whose bent for punctuality and for the systematic conduct of office duties amounted almost to a passion, the somewhat mercurial exits and entrances of the new Director-General of the Territorial Forces in connection with the buildings in Whitehall were anathema for a time. But, as he became familiar with his superior's way and was able to judge of results, he had to acknowledge to himself—and it is characteristic of him that he should do so freely in his diary—that General Cowans did somehow get things done. Nor is it wholly unlikely that association with a successful administrator, who arrived at the same goal as he did but by a wholly different route, may have been an

illuminating experience for a keen and zealous Staff Officer, who, in spite of having subordinates with their duties definitely told off to them at his beck and call, always seemed to have more paper-work to get through than he could dispose of within the time at his disposal." [1]

§ 4

In the course of his tour of the country Cowans achieved much. The Territorial Force problem was a complicated one, but he met it with that simplicity which was the keynote of his character, and this enabled him to press through every obstacle with that wonderful directness which was the outstanding feature of all his work. He seized the main points of the issue before him, and worked back, as was his custom, by induction. Thus the trees (and in this case they were many) never obscured his view of the wood. His grasp of the essentials of the problem was instantaneous and unerring, and was then, as always, followed by unhesitating action.

His simplicity also showed in a remarkable absence of anything that might be called " swank." He was entirely free from any suspicion of " swelled head," and even his enemies could not accuse him of anything in the remotest degree approaching pompousness or conceit. This was one of his endearing qualities, appreciated by all with whom he came in contact, and, combined with what General Fry so well describes as his " friendly yet forceful manner," it was particularly useful to him in his dealings with the County Associations.

On the Associations he found good business men;

[1] *Op. Cit.*, p. 102.

they admired Lord Haldane and were for the most part desirous to make his organisation a success. They had accomplished much, often under difficult circumstances, and were anxious to do their best, but some of them had been embittered by financial difficulties. The Associations received annual grants out of the Army funds voted by Parliament, and carried out their financial transactions direct with the War Office, the object being to relieve the Commanding Officers of financial questions. This they were doing, but they considered the grants inadequate, and they had been told that no more money was forthcoming.

Cowans, himself a business man both by instinct and by training, met them in exactly the right spirit. He knew well enough that the tax-payer would be averse to finding more money for the training of a citizen army in days when war seemed so far away, and realised that the Government in power, pledged to economy as it was, would naturally remain obedient to the wishes of the electors. He said to the Associations, " If we haven't got as much cloth as we should like to have, we must cut our coat according to the cloth we have. You have done wonders already; I want you to do better still. You can count on me to help you." And help he did, particularly by obtaining for them more latitude in the disposal of any surplus funds that accrued.

At the same time he insisted that the appointment of the secretaries of the Associations, upon whom so much depended, must be given to the most efficient men that could be found, and not because one happened to be a prominent man in the country or another the nephew of the LordL-ieutenant. It was essential that the appointments should go by merit and not by favouritism if the

County Associations were going to do what was expected of them.

His frankness was engaging and his enthusiasm was infectious, and he soon found a response. He on his part did his best to give the Associations what they needed, to effect improvements where he could, and to make conditions of training more attractive for the men—it was characteristic that he should think of them. The Force wanted popularising. It was asking a good deal to get men to go into camp for fifteen days a year, and the obvious way to attract them was by giving them a better time. The simplest way to do this was to make arrangements for the camps to be pitched in pleasant places. In this he was very successful, and it was due to his influence that many camps were made near seaside towns, so that training was turned into a holiday instead of an ordeal.

It was a grievance in the Force that the separation allowance was confined to non-commissioned officers. Cowans admitted that this was hard on privates, but pointed out that no Minister would dare to ask Parliament for the sum required, and told them that the only thing for it was to work hard and become non-commissioned officers themselves.

The results of Cowans's straightforward methods were successful. He made employers more sympathetic, he made the training more attractive to the men, he gained the goodwill of the Associations. The following graceful tribute which Lord Dartmouth (the Earl of Dartmouth, K.C.B.) pays him is typical of the feelings of most of the Associations with whom he came in contact at this time:

"I have a most grateful recollection of a charming

personality, full of sympathy with us in our many difficulties, ever ready to help us with advice and suggestions, and an outstanding ability and determination which secured for us improvements with a promptitude that was at once unusual and refreshing."

There was, however, besides all this, another side to his task, in many ways infinitely more difficult than those mentioned. It has been explained how much Lord Haldane depended on the Lords-Lieutenant for the success of his scheme. Above all it was essential to consolidate their goodwill, for, once that was obtained, the goodwill of the county landowners followed, and it was the county people who could smooth the path of the Associations by making their lands available for manœuvring areas and much-needed rifle ranges, and by showing their public spirit in assisting the new organisation in every way they could.

At this task Cowans was incomparable. In carrying it out his combination of soldier, administrator and social figure was perfect. He, the son of a self-made man, met on equal terms the heads of the most illustrious families in England. There was hardly a country house of importance at which he was not a welcome figure, and this side of his work, which to critical or unsympathetic persons seemed frivolous, had—as in India—far-reaching results. Perhaps in no country in the world could such a combination of qualities have been so effective. Possibly in post-War days success on such lines would be much more difficult.

Therefore, when Lord Haldane, in the face of some powerful opposition, chose Cowans for the post of Director-General, he added to the long list of brilliant services he has, in various capacities, rendered to the State, and it

was thanks to him that the future Quartermaster-General was in harness at the War Office when the crisis came.

Cowans's work, however, was not without its amusing moments; he never forgot the wisdom of laughter and loved telling the following story:

The Colonel of a certain Territorial regiment was a very poor horseman. During an inspection when the order was given "Advance in column," the band started the March Past and the Colonel's horse began to rear and plunge to such a degree that he was almost unseated. As the leading Company neared the saluting base, their Captain, glancing round, saw that his two front ranks were marching very badly and that they were all bunched up together, intent only on watching the Commanding Officer's effort to maintain his dignity and his seat.

So the Captain shouted angrily, "Ease off, there! Ease off!" "No, he's not," a private was heard to mutter, "but he dam'd soon will be!"

§ 5

Cowans returned from his tour with good work done. There still, however, remained much to do, and in those days he often remained writing at the War Office till the small hours, when clerks and secretaries had long departed. He followed his custom of getting round him men he knew and trusted and when, at the end of 1910, he required a Staff Captain for the Directorate he sent for Colonel A. W. F. Baird (then Captain) who in 1907 had, at his special request, spent the summer attached to his Staff in Simla. Colonel Baird was recalled from a Staff Appointment at Mauritius and came willingly. Of his experiences during this period he writes:

"He was the best and kindest chief that any man ever served under, and none but those who served under him as I did can ever realise how far his kindness extended. In those days he received an enormous daily post and I was often kept busy for hours running from one War Office Department to another with some request of his on behalf of some friends who had written to him. He was always ready to help anyone, no matter of what rank, age or class, provided that he was satisfied that there were reasonable grounds for doing so. I suppose it was his consideration for others that made him so enormously popular, quite apart from the great ability with which he tackled any problem he had to solve."

He continued to spend a considerable part of his time travelling about the country carrying out inspections, and he was unremitting in his efforts to raise the Force to the level upon which it had been planned. In this he had Lord Haldane's constant sympathy and encouragement, and in the recess he used to go to Cloan, Lord Haldane's home in Perthshire, to discuss matters there.

Men less practical would have been discouraged, and while he, like all soldiers, would have liked to see something better, yet he accepted the best he could get and worked to improve it without tilting at windmills. He realised as well as anyone the unreadiness of the Territorial Force for war, and that a high standard of efficiency could not be attained by men who were for the most part in constant civil employment and had no more than periodical drills and a fortnight's training every year. He was even wont to admit that Lord Haldane's own description of the Force as a half-baked one was apt. But he knew the material was good; he set himself to

make the training more practical than it had been in the past. He was confident that, as he put it, the Force would be thoroughly baked in the six months' training which, it was assumed, would be available after the outbreak of hostilities.

There is little doubt, even in the light of the European War, that the Territorial scheme was the best that would have proved acceptable to the country at the time. The views of Lord Haldane himself, given in *Before the War*, are particularly interesting:

"It is said that we in Great Britain ought, before entering on the Entente, to have provided an army, not of 160,000 but of 2,000,000 men. And it is remarked that this is what we had to do in the end. This suggestion does not, however, bear scrutiny. No doubt it would have been a great advantage if, in addition to our tremendous navy, we could have produced, at the outbreak of the War, 2,000,000 men, so trained as to be the equals in this respect of German troops, and properly fashioned into the great divisions that were necessary, with full equipment and auxiliary services. But to train the recruits, and to command such an army when fashioned, would have required a very great corps of professional officers of high military education, many times as large as we had actually raised. How were these to have been got?

"But what I am saying does not rest on my conclusions alone. In the year 1912 the then Chief of the General Staff told me that he and the General Staff would like to investigate, as a purely military problem, the question whether we could or could not raise a great army. I thought this a reasonable enquiry and sanctioned and found money for it, only stipulating that they should

consult with the Administrative Staffs when assembling the materials for the investigation. The outcome was embodied in a report made to me by Lord Nicholson, himself a soldier who had a strong desire for compulsory service and a large army. He reported, as the result of a prolonged and careful investigation, that, alike as regarded officers and as regarded buildings and equipment, the conclusion of the General Staff was that it would be in a high degree unwise to try, during a period of unrest on the Continent, to commence a new military system. It could not be built up excepting after much unavoidable delay. We might at once experience a falling off in voluntary recruiting, and so become seriously weaker before we had a chance of becoming stronger. And the temptation to a foreign General Staff to make an early end of what it might insist on interpreting as preparation for aggression on our part would be too strong to be risked. What we should get might prove to be a mob in place of an army. I quite agreed, and not the less because it was highly improbable that the country would have looked at anything of the sort. . . .

"I am wholly unable to assent to the suggestion that we did not look ahead, or considered within the years just before the War whether we were preparing to make the sort of contribution that our own interests and our friendships alike required. Sea power was for us then, as always before in our history, the dominant element in military policy. I have little doubt that we made mistakes over details. That is inherent in human and therefore finite effort. But I believe that we did in the main the best we could for the fulfilment of our only purpose, which was to preserve peace of the world and avoid contributing to its disturbance, and also to

prepare to defend ourselves and our friends against aggression."

Cowans was not an alarmist and although, even in India, he realised the likelihood of a European War in his own time, he dismissed the fear of invasion on anything more serious than the scale of a raid. Nevertheless he was alive to the need of instilling feelings of patriotism and duty into the nation, which, as he once described it to an interviewer, was apparently suffering from sleeping sickness. It was his opinion, and he expressed it frequently and in no measured terms, that the Territorial Scheme was the last chance the British people would have to continue voluntary military service, and that it was no good for the shirkers to criticise others and say it would be "all right on the night," as if they were rehearsing amateur theatricals. Therefore, while he did his utmost to obtain the right stamp of officer which was so badly needed, he continually urged the whole Force to do its best to persuade others to join for, as he said, recruiting rested not only with the County Associations and the Commanding Officers but on every member of the corps. "It is a great pity," he remarked once, "that we can not enlist the sympathies of the fair sex as was the case in Switzerland, where girls absolutely tabooed any man who shirked military service." [1]

It was up-hill work, this task of interesting the nation in soldiering, when, lulled into complacency, its thoughts were so far from war. Cowans himself, though his efforts were not without results, knew well enough that it would need something greater to wake up England. He realized how much he had to contend with, but his sense of fun saved him from discouragement, and, at this

[1] In an interview in *The Military Mail*, February 10, 1911.

time, he was fond of repeating the following verse in the drawling and emphatic tone his friends so well remember :

" I was playing golf the day
The German Army landed.
Ev-ery soldier ran away,
Ev-ery ship was stranded.
And the thought of England's shame
Nearly put me off my game."

§ 6

Besides his direct work with the Territorial Force, Cowans undertook another piece of organisation which had far-reaching results. This was his scheme for the enumeration and purchase of horses for the Territorial Force, with which was closely allied the provision of horses for the Expeditionary Force.

One of the duties definitely assigned to the County Associations was to provide, by hire or other means, riding and draught horses that were wanted for the Force. In addition to this, however, they were required to carry out, in conjunction with the military authorities, the registration of horses for all army purposes. The demands of the Regular Army had to be considered first, indeed the registration of horses for the Territorial Force was originally considered unnecessary, owing to the powers of requisition given by the Army Act, on the Force being embodied for war training. The County Associations had to collect statistics of the number of horses of various classes in their areas, working with the Deputy-Assistant Director of Remounts of each command.

In this way a certain amount of information had been accumulated by the Territorial Adjutants ; in spite of

many obstacles and some opposition they had, working in conjunction with the police, made a rough census of the horses available in their counties in 1910. When he took over the Directorate Cowans found, however, that, although the information gained showed that there were in the country plentiful resources on which to draw, it was, nevertheless, far from complete, and that the arrangements for the actual supply of horses in the event of mobilisation, both for the Territorial Force and for the whole Expeditionary Forces, were lamentably deficient.

At this time the British Isles were divided into some half-dozen areas, each under a Remount Officer, who was supposed, with the help of three or four selected civilians, to be able to produce the horse requirements of the Expeditionary Force at a moment's notice. These unfortunate men had perhaps half a dozen counties apiece to deal with; above all they had no means of collecting animals and no arrangements for despatching them to their depôts. As it takes a very good man to buy a hundred horses in a day when they have been paraded in a yard for the purpose, it is not difficult to imagine what chance they had of buying, in four or five days, several thousand, scattered over several counties.

The County Associations were well aware of this unsatisfactory state of affairs and Captain Kennedy Shaw (Lieutenant-Colonel F. S. Kennedy Shaw), who was Secretary to the North Riding Territorial Association, asked the President, Sir Hugh Bell (Sir Hugh Bell, Bt., C.B.), to see what he could do personally to bring the matter forward.

Sir Hugh spoke to Cowans on the subject, pointing out that there existed no reliable machinery for the purchase of the large numbers of horses that would

be required in the event of mobilisation. Cowans at once took the matter up, promised to do all he could, and a few days later went for a week-end to Rounton Grange (Sir Hugh Bell's,) where Colonel Kennedy Shaw had been invited to meet him.

Of that meeting Colonel Shaw writes as follows:

"I found that Cowans had already given thought to the problem and he was the first man at the War Office who had realised that horses cannot be shaken off a tree when suddenly required and that guns and wagons do not move by themselves. This was the more remarkable as he cared little for horses himself. In fact, at our first meeting he remarked that he regarded the horse as 'the natural enemy of man.' None the less, he tackled the problem as no one had previously done. He had come down specially from London to cross-examine me on it, and although the whole subject must have been fairly new to him, I was immensely struck with his grasp of the details and difficulties.

"I had worked out a scheme for the compulsory purchase of horses by districts in the county I was concerned with, and Cowans immediately made it his own, amending it in a remarkable way for a man who can have known little of the minor points of country life in England, which naturally affected any such scheme enormously. We talked the scheme over nearly all one Saturday night and most of the Sunday and he squeezed me like a sponge. When we parted I believe he knew more about my own suggestions than I did.

"For example, we had some discussion as to paying owners of horses impressed on mobilisation. I thought in the rush that there might be some whose money would have to be sent to them in consequence of their not

appearing at the place of impressment to draw it, through being annoyed at their horses being seized. 'Take the calf and the cow will come after it,' was J. S. C.'s only comment.

" He paid me the compliment of asking me to go to the War Office as Assistant Director of Remounts to put my scheme into effect. This offer I declined, as I have no use for London life, but he frequently consulted me when the details were being worked out by others. At his suggestion I gave up the North Riding Secretaryship and entered the Remount Service in a minor capacity. Consequently I was once more a serving soldier and thus had less access to him personally than as a civilian, but I was always impressed by his grasp of a subject which was a hobby to me from life-long devotion to the horse itself.

" His delightful sense of humour always made official difficulties easy. He once told me the story of the Quartermaster-General who was put 'on the floor' outside Paddington Station as the procession for a Royal funeral was being formed up. When the gallant officer had eventually survived the dangers of a mounted procession through London and returned exhausted to the War Office, he found the following anonymous lines on his lead pad:

> Though your presence and manners they charm me;
> You should learn as a matter of course,
> 'Ere you can *Quarter* master an Army,
> You wholly must master a horse.

" 'That,' said Cowans, 'applies to me also,' and he proceeded forthwith on paper to master the horse with marvellous success."

The results of Cowans's work as Director-General of

the Territorial Forces were not spectacular. No one expected them to be. He had, however, done what Lord Haldane called him from India to do. That was much. When he took up his appointment, the Force had reached a critical stage in its development; it needed not so much a strong man as a man with tact and good sense, and had the situation been handled less delicately than Cowans handled it, the scheme might easily have been a failure even then. Cowans made it a success. He faced the difficulties with which he had to contend, and in his own inimitable way he succeeded in getting rid of many inefficient Volunteer officers of the old type without hurting their feelings. He made great use of his wide circle of friends, and managed to round off angles and make rough places smooth where new authorities were impatient of control. His personal relationships with Chairmen of the Territorial Force's County Associations were of great value, and he was always accessible and sympathetic.

He helped to obtain more financial power, and was at great pains to provide adequate rifle ranges; he made countless small adjustments in connection with groups of scattered units. The result was that the relationships between the War Office and the Associations improved considerably; where Cowans found friction he left harmony. He introduced few changes, but by smoothing away difficulties which had previously existed he enabled the Force to have its chance of growing and developing, without undue interference, on the lines laid down by Lord Haldane; in fact he found the Territorial Force a fortuitous concourse of atoms and welded it into a homogeneous whole, giving it a heart of its own to beat and a tail of its own to wag.

Fortunately he was succeeded as Director-General by

an officer of wide experience and great ability who fully shared his belief in the future of the Force. General Bethune (Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Bethune, K.C.B.), Director-General from 1912 to 1917, and it was largely owing to him that during the War it won a record of achievement not equalled by any similar Force in history.

Lord Scarborough (Colonel the Earl of Scarborough, G.B.E.), succeeded General Bethune in 1917. The post is now held by Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh S. Jeudwine, K.C.B.

CHAPTER VI

JUNE, 1912—JULY, 1914

§ 1

Becomes Quartermaster-General—Survey of European situation 1890-1912—Soldiers and politics—The cession of Heligoland—Opening of the Kiel Canal—The German Emperor's war preparations—The Franco-British Entente—Germany and Morocco—The Fall of Monsieur Delcassé—The Agadir incident—Lord Haldane's views—His mission to Germany—Increases in the German Army—The political situation at home—Lord Haldane's work for the Army—Efficiency—Staff liaison work—The Government policy—Lord Haldane's comments—Social outlook at home—The Curragh incident—Its effects on the Army.

ON June 3, 1912, exactly twenty-six months before the outbreak of the European War, Cowans became Quartermaster-General to the Forces and Third Military Member of the Army Council.

To understand the task he had immediately in front of him it is necessary briefly to recall the political aspect of home and continental affairs at that time.

Soldiers, as such, have of course no politics; they, however, are the instruments of policy, and their activities are necessarily circumscribed by the views of the Government in office.

There can be no doubt but that in 1912 all thinking men and women with any capacity to weigh events were, in a general sense, seriously perturbed by the European

outlook. How far their feeling of insecurity was definitely envisaged as an immediate menace it would be difficult to say. Men's memories are so much impressed by the great dramatic events which have since taken place that it may well be they did not realise the warning shadows as vividly as they are apt in retrospect to imagine.

The general claim of the soldier that he foresaw the war with Germany must be accepted subject to certain qualifications. The exact truth of course is that soldiers always foresee a war. It is their business. They are concerned not only with the war preparations, secret or open, of their own country, but with those of other countries, and are always on the alert to find out exactly what these may be.

The politician of course realises this, and therefore for the most part discounts everything the soldier says. He likes to be in a position to tell the country he is a stern and unbending supporter of economy; that he is always saving the taxpayers' money; that they can sleep comfortably in their beds at night, or any other soothing-syrup he can think of. He justifies himself with the reflection that the soldier is always crying wolf, and no wolf comes. Wait-and-see-ism is, moreover, a doctrine that fits in with the national procrastinating temperament. And everyone, no matter how ardent a patriot or how keenly alive to international dangers, is only too glad of an excuse for putting off spending money on armaments.

It is on the whole probably a good thing that in this country soldiers are not permitted unduly to influence political decisions. They are specialists and, as such, their outlook is instinctively limited. Moreover, it is an

axiom of their service that attack is the best form of defence. No doubt this was absolutely true when the foundations of military science were in the process of being laid. In our own times it can only, at the most, be relatively true, and the equilibrium of pre-War Europe was such that an incautious word would have been quite enough to snap the delicate thread by which the wings of disaster were confined.

England realised this and so did France, and every responsible statesman in both countries knew that one braggart stamping around shouting about mailéd fists and shining armour was just as much as the overstrained nerves of the old world could stand.

This, then, may have seemed to English statesmen an additional reason for appearing to pay even less than the usual attention to the views of the soldier. On this point Lord Haldane is informing. He was Secretary of State for War from 1905 to 1912; in a very real sense the creator of our contemptible little Army and our Territorial Force, a student and a man of affairs, and his is probably the final word on this point. He writes:

"Why Germany acted as she did then is a matter that still requires careful investigation. My own feeling is that she has demonstrated the extreme risk of confiding great political decisions to military advisers. It is not their business to have the last word in deciding between peace and war. The problem is too far-reaching for their training. Bismarck knew this well, and often said it, as students of his life and reflections are aware." [1]

The Agadir incident in 1911 was undoubtedly the

[1] *Before the War*, p. 73.

event that most dramatically and significantly justified the soldier's point of view.

As far back, however, as 1888, the year in which William II. succeeded to the throne as ninth King of Prussia and third German Emperor, Germany had begun to enlarge her army, and in that year the German Forces were increased by more than half a million men.

In 1892, the Emperor, having meanwhile got rid of Bismarck (in 1890), decided that the increases of 1888 were insufficient, and General Caprivi, the new Chancellor, therefore submitted to the Reichstag a proposal to add 86,000 men to the army on a peace footing. It was not, however, sanctioned, and the Reichstag was dissolved immediately.

In July, 1893, the new Assembly, much more amenable to the wishes of the Emperor, passed the Bill, but by a very narrow majority.

Feeling that his army was now something he could firmly build upon later, the Emperor began to bustle about looking for colonies. Like all parvenus he felt he must have everything that older Empires possessed, and he had always secretly watched with greedy jealousy the expansion of Britain.

In 1890, under the premiership of Lord Salisbury,[1] he acquired from us the island of Heligoland, which dominates the mouths of the Elbe and the Weser, and then promptly announced that the future of Germany was upon the water.

We now know why the Emperor felt so elated. He could never have hoped that a statesman of Lord Salisbury's ripe experience would have made such a mistake.

[1] Robert Arthur Talbot, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, K.G., died 1903.

The Emperor and his advisers realised that without Heligoland the Kiel Canal was of no service to a German Fleet, and were therefore prepared to pay any price for its acquisition, although they naturally carefully concealed their eagerness. Lord Salisbury, who had apparently no prevision of a menacing German Fleet, looked upon the island as of no value to either England or Germany. All his Cabinet did not agree with him, nor did the general public.

However, Heligoland was duly exchanged for concessions in Zanzibar, and was thus the first of a long list of useless concessions to Germany's rapidly bulging ambitions. In the result, this little island, with its area of three-quarters of a square mile and its fortifications on which Germany spent millions of pounds, became from 1914 to 1918 not only an advanced base for the German Naval forces, but the Heligoland Bight was the centre of areas alive with submarines and minefields.

Having secured Heligoland, the Emperor then established a Naval Cabinet in addition to his Military one, and hailed joyfully innumerable occasions for dressing himself up in all sorts of naval uniforms. He seems automatically to have become a high authority on naval matters, and about then, or perhaps later, announced to an amused Europe that he was Lord High Admiral of the Atlantic, or some similar imbecile title reminiscent of the childhood of the Eastern world.

His attitudinising had at any rate the effect, undesigned and undesired by him (and in the sequel momentous) of preventing wise observers taking him as seriously as they ought perhaps to have done.

He did not find it as easy as he desired to obtain from the Reichstag all the money he required for his

grandiose schemes, and this led many to conclude that, whatever the personal views of the Emperor and his entourage and friends, the German people were peaceful and law-abiding.

The Socialists of England and France, with their extraordinary capacity for imitating the ostrich, insisted that their beloved comrades in Germany would never agree to anything so aggressive as even saying "boo" to the French or English goose.

The Kiel Canal was opened with the utmost magnificence in the summer of 1895, and the Atlantic was dramatically saluted by its new Lord High Admiral: we may be permitted to assume that it was a little astonished.

Six months later, on the occasion of the celebrations connected with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Empire, the Emperor informed all who cared to listen that his Empire had become a world-wide one, and that even as its subjects resided in every clime so its flag must flaunt on every sea. Only he did not call it flaunting.

His next move, and it was an extraordinarily astute one, was to call to his assistance men of science, commerce and letters in a manner we might well copy, and from that moment the burden of their entire combined teaching was that economic and cultural forces must be so organised and directed that they, just like the army and navy, became potent instruments to develop an expansion demanded alike by nature and destiny.

In 1897 the Emperor sent his brother, Prince Henry of Prussia, on a grand tour as a commercial traveller. This Prince, less vain and theatrical than his elder brother, and a sailor of some ability, created a good impression on many people, particularly in England, who instinctively

distrusted and disliked the Emperor. The Prince was told, on being sent to the Far East, that the budding commerce of Germany could not develop itself unless it "felt safe." Imperial power, he was further informed, presupposes power both on land and sea.

It was left to the world to surmise the nature of the forces that prevented Germany from feeling "safe."

All these things but served to lead up to the proud moment in 1900 when, as the result of untold labour and with the backing of von Bulow and Tirpitz, the Emperor was enabled to say boastingly to the world that "upon the waves and along the remotest shores no important decision could be taken without Germany—without the German Emperor."

The Reichstag, for a considerable period indifferent, if not actually hostile, to the Emperor's naval ambitions, had now become docile and by a two-thirds majority passed a new Bill doubling the programme of 1898 and providing for the building of fourteen armoured cruisers and some forty ships of the line.

Even the British Government could hardly have continued seriously to pretend that all this was not aimed at England, in view of the fact that the preamble to the Bill stated that Germany "must have a fleet so strong that even the greatest naval power should not be able to risk a war against her without jeopardising its own supremacy."

This may not have alarmed the House of Commons, indeed, it does not seem to have done so, but to sailors and soldiers it appeared suspiciously like a threat. Yet it had its good results, inasmuch as in 1904, under the Premiership of Mr. Balfour (the Earl of Balfour, K.G.), and thanks largely to the unceasing and indefatigable

efforts of King Edward VII. and Lord Lansdowne, the long-projected Franco-British agreement was signed. This, provided our supremacy at sea was maintained, gave us security on land, because the French armies then by implication became with us the guardians of the Channel Ports.

We had already (in 1902) done something to safeguard ourselves in the Far East by an alliance with Japan, and this we also owed to the foresight and statesmanship of Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne.

It had always been generally recognised in Europe that France had special interests and responsibilities in Morocco. The German Emperor, in the early part of 1905, decided to make one of his spectacular trips, and unwisely chose the Mediterranean as a background. Ever since the moment he was bitten with the craze for colonies he had kept a covetous eye not only on South but on North Africa and this, being well-known and resented in France, did not make for the peace of Europe.

During his cruise he called at Lisbon, and Queen Amélie, who is of course a Princess of France, with a moral courage that is characteristic, strongly advised him to turn his eyes elsewhere for colonies and not land at Tangier. As Queen of Portugal, Her Majesty had naturally a peculiar interest in Morocco, which was settled by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.

The year 1907 was a memorable one. The fall of Monsieur Delcassé was generally regarded throughout Europe as a distinct—indeed startling—triumph for Germany; it further emphasised the growing German menace, and of course aroused acute anxiety in France. An agreement was made between France and Japan, thus checkmating Germany in the far East, and considerably strengthening the Entente; the Russo-Japanese

understanding contributed further to its consolidation. In all this King Edward, working always faithfully within the limits of the Constitution, did a great work of foresight, sagacity and diplomacy for which he has not yet received full credit.

In July, 1911, a German gunboat, the *Panther*, dropped anchor before Agadir—the key to Morocco. It was a deliberate affront to France and, need it be said, something like a challenge to England, and was designed to force conversations with France and Spain regarding concessions in Morocco to Germany ; in spite of the fact that, at the Algeciras Conference in 1906, or a little over five years previously, an agreement had been signed which clearly set forth the fact that Germany had no special political interests in that country.

The German attempt to occupy Agadir was frustrated chiefly by British intervention. Under pressure, Germany withdrew her pretentions in Morocco, and in return France compensated her with 100,000 square miles of the French Congo. This territory, it will be remembered, reverted to France under the Treaty of Versailles.

The Agadir incident made a great sensation throughout the world, and in Germany the Emperor and his satellites saw that it led to clamorous demands for further naval expansion.

Outside Germany, however, it had not quite the effect designed. England had displayed a quite unexpected firmness and was not to be cajoled, bribed or frightened into permitting Germany to intimidate France. As so often happens, a firm policy and clearly expressed views had an excellent effect, and immediately our relationships with Germany greatly improved. Moreover, it consolidated the Entente that had been steadily growing up

between France and England from the fateful hours they spent side by side around the Algeciras Council Table. It also contributed to draw France and Russia, and England and Russia and Japan, closer together.

There are those who hold that a similarly firm front all along the line between Agadir and Sarajevo would have prevented the European War. But the domain of conjecture in international affairs, however fascinating, is a profitless one on which to embark.

In view of the Agadir incident, Europe in general, and England in particular, could no longer pretend to ignore the aggressive aims and warlike spirit of Germany's rulers, although there was then, and in some quarters for long afterwards, a tacit conspiracy to insist on the peace-loving qualities of the German peoples. On this interesting point we cannot do better than again quote the views of Lord Haldane. He was for long a close and understanding student of Germans and Germany, and, if an exceedingly acute he was also a very sympathetic observer. He writes:

"Moreover, sensible as a large number of Germans were, there was a certain tendency to swelled-headedness in the nation. It had had an extraordinarily rapid development, based on principles of organisation in every sphere of activity—principles derived from the lesson of the necessity of thinking before acting enjoined by the great teachers of the beginning of the nineteenth century. The period down to about 1832 seems to me to correspond, in the intellectual prodigies it produced, to our Elizabethan period. It came no doubt to an end in its old and distinctive aspect. But its spirit assumed, later on, a new form, that of organisation for material ends based on careful reflection and calculation. In industry, in commerce, in the

army, and in the navy, the work of mind was everywhere apparent. *Aus einem Lernvolk wollen wir ein Thatvolk werden* was the new watchword." [1]

England with her inveterately peaceful disposition was not, however, content to rely on understandings and alliances for the maintenance of peace, nor was she ready to believe the worst of the German people or despair of continued efforts to come to a full understanding with Germany, and was prepared to make generous concessions and sacrifices, and even to shoulder risks, if she could thereby preserve the peace of the world. It is well to note that in this the Liberal Government was faithfully carrying on the policy of Lord Salisbury so signally emphasised by the unwise cession of Heligoland.

In February, 1912, in pursuance of this policy, Lord Haldane went on a mission to Germany. He achieved nothing, because he could not agree to Germany's characteristic demand that England should guarantee to remain neutral in the event of war, a condition so framed that it would not only have made it impossible to aid France if she were attacked, but the acceptance of which would have ended the Franco-British Entente forthwith.

It must not be thought that the Emperor's devotion to the creation of a navy caused him or his Government to forget or neglect the army. On the contrary. Their development and strengthening was coincident and complementary. In 1911 the five-year period of military service was renewed; in April, 1912, two months after Lord Haldane's visit, measures were announced ensuring more prompt preparation for war. An increase in officers and men was demanded that would give a total

[1] *Op. Cit.*, p. 68

effective force of 700,000 men, and create between six and seven hundred six-gun heavy artillery batteries.

The Bill became law in May and its provisions were carried into effect in the following autumn, or about one year before the outbreak of War.

By this time most soldiers who had at all considered the matter were of the opinion that the inevitable war with Germany could not much longer be delayed: it is now easy to understand the warlike spirit aroused in Germany by all these preparations and by the feeling of the Emperor and his friends that they were at last strong enough to assert their will on all occasions.

Politicians who were then in the British Cabinet, being wise after the event, now dislike admitting that they did not share the view of the soldier, and perhaps have some difficulty in explaining why they did not allow it more effectively to prevail.

Mr. Churchill (Major the Right Honourable Winston Spencer Churchill, C.H.) has said that in 1912 he was taking every precaution and working with feverish haste night and day to prepare the Fleet as we knew the Germans were arming rapidly. He had suggested his naval holiday to Germany in April of that year, two months after Lord Haldane's fruitless visit to Berlin, and almost at the moment Germany had decided to adopt the new Navy Law.

This, briefly, was the outlook in Europe when Cowans assumed duty as Quartermaster-General.

§ 2

We must next glance at the political situation at home.

At this time a Liberal Government had been in office for more than four years, and its supporters never allowed it to forget that its leading professions have always been peace and economy. The Government were doubtless increasingly anxious about the growing tension in Europe and thoroughly alive to the necessity for taking such measures as were possible to meet all eventualities.

Lord Haldane, or Mr. Haldane as he then was, whatever his feelings as a politician, certainly did his utmost to bring the Army to the maximum state of efficiency, and, it may be added here, Cowans had an immense admiration and respect for him and looked upon him as one of our greatest Ministers of War. He was then reaching the end of his six and a half years' brilliant and memorable reign at the War Office. We have already seen in an earlier chapter what he did for the Territorial Army and were soon to realise how much his success in organising and inspiring it would mean in the most fate-filled hour of our history. In that success Cowans could rightly claim, as we have also seen, a notable, if limited share.

It will be as well here briefly to summarise what our military preparations were, and, as he was almost entirely responsible for them, to quote—as far as possible—Lord Haldane. Where he is not actually cited, what is written is for the most part founded on his own words or on the words of those who were his military advisers.

Speaking of the years of our military preparation between 1906 and 1914, he states that the Expeditionary Force, the Territorial Force, and the Special Reserve had been organised by soldiers who had studied modern war upon what was to us wholly novel principles.

" Before they took matters in hand," he writes, " not only was there no Divisional organisation, but hardly a

Brigade could have been sent to the Continent without being recast. For there used to be a peace organisation that was different from the organisation that was required for war, and to convey the former into the latter meant a delay that would have been deadly. Swift mobilisation, like that of the Germans even in 1870, was in these older days impracticable.

" All this had been changed for the Regular Army at home by the end of 1908, and it was after that year easy to mobilise. Other changes, also of a sweeping character, had been made to complete the new structure."

Lord Haldane rightly insists that in all these measures our aims were of course purely defensive. We had no ambition to own an Army comparable in size with those of the great Continental Powers nor, in view of our Entente with France and Russia, did we require one. We did, however, feel that our small professional Army could be made the equal of any in quality and efficiency. Lord Haldane then set himself this particular task and, as the sequel so notably proved, achieved something as near perfection as any human fighting machine the world is ever likely to see.

The Secretary of State for War saw further that it was essential for us to have a highly trained General Staff, not only to co-operate with the French General Staff but with a Naval General Staff, one having been established —somewhat belatedly—in 1911 during Mr. Winston Churchill's reign at the Admiralty.

As early as 1906 Lord Haldane had secured the authority of the Prime Minister (Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman) for directing the War Office Staff to take the necessary steps to get into close touch with the General Staff in France and examine on the spot the problems that

would arise were the French and British Armies ever required to stand side by side on French soil. It is well to repeat Lord Haldane's reminder that this involved a new Army problem:

"It was, how to mobilise and concentrate at a place of assembly to be opposite the Belgian frontier, a force calculated as adequate (with the assistance of Russian pressure in the East) to make up for the inadequacy of the French armies for their great task of defending the entire French frontier from Dunkirk down to Belfort, or even farther south, if Italy should join the Triple Alliance in an attack.

"But an investigation of a searching character presently revealed great deficiencies in the British military organisation of these days. We had never contemplated the preparation of armies for warfare of the Continental type. The older generals had not been trained for this problem. We had, it was true, excellent troops in India and elsewhere. These were required as outposts for Imperial defence. As they had to serve for long periods and to be thoroughly disciplined, they had to be professional soldiers, engaged to serve in most cases for seven years with the colours and afterwards for five in the reserve. They were highly trained men, and there was a good reserve of them at home. But that reserve was not organised in the great self-contained divisions which would be required for fighting against armies organised for rapid action on modern Continental principles."

It was in these circumstances that the reorganisation of the Army and the development of the General Staff was begun. Lord Haldane again says:

"There was, therefore, nothing for it but to attempt

a complete revolution in the organisation of the British Army at home. The nascent General Staff was finally organised in September, 1906, and its organisation was shortly afterwards developed so as to extend to the entire Empire, as soon as a Conference had taken place with the Ministers of the Dominions early in the following year. The outcome was a complete recasting, which, after three years' work, made it practicable rapidly to mobilise not only 100,000 men, but 160,000 men; to transport them, with the aid of the Navy, to a place of concentration which had been settled between the staff of France and Britain; and to have them at their appointed place within twelve days, an interval based on what the German Army required on its side for a corresponding concentration."

Although the general European situation necessitated these preparations the Government did not even then accept the view that war was inevitable; and they were careful to make this plain to the Army authorities and the country. Speaking of their policy Lord Haldane said:

"For, on the one hand, its foundation was the theory that, amid the circumstances of Europe in which it had to be built up, human nature could not be safely relied on unswervingly to resist warlike impulses. On the other hand, this peril notwithstanding, it was the considered view of those responsible that war neither ought to be regarded as being inevitable, nor was so in fact. It was quite true that the development of military preparations had been so great as to make Europe resemble an armed camp; but, if actual conflict could be averted, the burden this state of things implied ought finally to render its continuance no longer tolerable. What was finally required was that unbroken peace should be preserved, and the hand of time left to operate."

The efforts of the Government to maintain peace have already been referred to. Again Lord Haldane must be the authority:

"Our efforts to preserve the peace ended in failure. The cause of that failure was nothing that we failed to do or that France did. It was proximately Austrian recklessness and indirectly, but just as strongly, German ambition. A real desire in July, 1914, on the part of the Central Powers to avoid war would have averted it. That Serbia may have been a provocative neighbour is no answer to the reproaches made to-day against the old Governments in Vienna and Berlin. They failed to take the steps requisite if peace were to be preserved."

§ 3

Although soldiers are not supposed to hold and certainly may not aggressively express political views, they are nevertheless directly affected by politics, and there are times, happily rare, when their duty as soldiers and as citizens may appear to conflict. When this unfortunately happens only the utmost tact, consideration and forbearance on the part of all concerned, and a selfless devotion to national interests, will avoid disaster.

At home, as well as abroad, the years immediately prior to 1914 were filled with innumerable and complex political difficulties. Social, economic and party issues were acute and there was a crude spirit of greed, money-making and class-interest abroad that resulted in sectional claims of all sorts being prosecuted with the maximum of selfishness. The facts are notorious and many writers have dealt with them. The World, Europe, the German

Emperor, even we ourselves, were deceived by the outlook, and throughout the world everyone mistook appearances for realities.

Prosperity was general; science was rapidly advancing; even art, literature and music were on the whole prosperous; nations were piling up armaments without apparently daring to stop to ask themselves why. Society everywhere was brilliant and luxurious and amusement had become a general obsession. The old world might be likened to a great and famous beauty whose first youth had fled. On the outside everything looked the same. Observers, not realising that moral collapse had taken place long before, could not grasp that as an inevitable consequence, mental and physical ruin were imminent. The general political situation at home may here be dismissed but for the one aspect of it which brought the Civil and Military authorities almost to the very verge of conflict and which, deeply affecting the social fabric throughout, shook the Army to its foundations.

In March, 1914, the fateful year, Mr. Asquith (the Right Honourable Herbert H. Asquith, P.C.), the Prime Minister, introduced in the House of Commons his proposals regarding the second reading of the Home Rule Bill, a part of which was the provision to exclude Ulster for six years. Mr. Carson (the Lord Carson of Duncairn, P.C.) had for some time been organising the Ulster Volunteers. The movement had received wide and influential support in England. English statesmen and politicians had combined to take active measures to assist Ulster and her hundred thousand Volunteers in their oath to resist by armed force any attempt to force them under a Home Rule or Dublin Parliament. Distinguished, popular, and level-headed leaders like Lord Willoughby de

Broke [1] were organising, arming and training in England men who were pledged to go to the aid of Ulster whenever ordered to do so.

The Irish Volunteers had set up a counter organisation in Ireland, and it also had its supporters, active or otherwise, in England and Scotland. On the Ulster side were men like Mr. F. E. Smith, M.P. (the Earl of Birkenhead, P.C.), Sir James Craig (Lieutenant-Colonel the Right Honourable Sir James Craig, Bt.), Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Captain Charles C. Craig and many more. The country was on the verge of civil war and our enemies, native or foreign, gleefully triumphed . . . and misunderstood.

On March 11, Mr. Lloyd George (the Right Honourable David Lloyd George, O.M.) had a breakfast-party —always a sign of danger. It was decided that the Third Battle Squadron and the Fourth Destroyer Flotilla should demonstrate in the neighbourhood of Belfast Lough and, rightly or wrongly, Mr. Churchill was blamed for this attempt to intimidate Ulster. A sub-committee of the Cabinet, including Lord Crewe(His Excellency the Earl of Crewe, K.G.) was appointed to consider the situation.

St. Patrick's Day (March 17) was chosen by the Government as an appropriate one on which to instruct the War Office to summon Sir Arthur Paget (General the Right Honourable Sir Arthur Paget,G.C.B.),Commanding the Forces in Ireland, to an interview, thus proving that the Cabinet as a whole had less tact than its individual members.

The Cabinet, apparently, were nervous as to what effect an order to undertake active service in Ulster

[1] Richard Greville, 19th Lord Willoughby de Broke, died December 16, 1923.

would have on the Army. Party newspapers on both sides had for some time previous been filled with alarmist anticipations which, as a matter of fact had, as far as the Army was concerned, no foundation whatever. Soldiers serving in Ireland at the time knew little or nothing about the approaching crisis, and were not deeply or even mildly excited about it. To represent the Army as seething with political feeling is false. For what afterwards took place the Government was alone responsible. The sending of battleships in force to Belfast Lough was a most unwise and provocative action. Naturally it incensed Ulster, encouraged the South and gave the impression in England that the Government was definitely committed to a policy of force: it certainly gave that impression to Germany. It has been said that Mr. Asquith counselled patience and delay, but was overruled by his more fiery colleagues.

The first thing General Paget did after his return to Ireland was to move some troops in accordance with instructions received from the Cabinet; this was purely a precautionary measure, but it served to thus accentuate the precipitated crisis.

He next summoned a conference of general officers serving under him and said " active operations " against Ulster were about to begin. Ulster officers, as a special privilege, were to be exempted from any operations that might take place there. In the War Office term they would be permitted to " disappear " and when all was over would be allowed to resume their places without their position or career being affected. These instructions were issued verbally! Other officers were required to decide if they were prepared to fight Ulster—to the bitter end if necessary. If they declined they were to

be " dismissed " the service. The Conference took place at 9.30 a.m. The assembled generals were required to send to Headquarters, by 5 p.m. the same day, the names of any officers who might decline to fight !

It is noteworthy that the penalty attached to refusal was illegal, because dismissal can only be carried out by sentence of Court Martial.

The officers in question were thus forced—quite unnecessarily as it turned out—to obey most unpleasant and grossly unfair orders by coming to an immediate decision affecting their whole future without being given even twenty-four hours in which to consider the problem, or consult their friends.

As a prelude to the Conference orders had been issued the night before (at 6 p.m.) that the troops were to be armed with ball ammunition. The effect of this on both officers and men can more easily be imagined than described.

It was widely believed at the time that a certain number of officers had actually refused an order to go to Ulster for the preservation of law and order. General Gough (Lieutenant-General Sir Hubert Gough, G.C.M.G.), at that time commanded the Third Cavalry Brigade stationed at the Curragh, and it is hardly necessary to say that neither he nor his officers either contemplated or did any such thing—they were soldiers. Had they been ordered north against Ulster in the ordinary way they would have marched. For the decision to force upon them an invidious choice the Government was alone responsible.

Certain instructions were then issued by the Secretary of State for War, Colonel Seely (Major-General the Right Honourable J. E. B. Seely, C.B.), Sir John French, Inspector-General of the Forces, and Sir Spencer Ewart, the Adjutant-General. For reasons that need not be recalled

here, the Cabinet disavowed at least in part the action of these high officers, and, as a result, Lord French and Sir Spencer Ewart resigned from the Army Council. Almost immediately General Seely followed their example. The two Generals were pressed to withdraw their resignations and refused, and Mr. Asquith announced to a surprised House of Commons that he had himself assumed the office of Secretary of State for War.

General Seely had directly succeeded Lord Haldane and carried on his admirable work of reorganisation and preparation, and, although the youngest man who had ever occupied that important post, proved himself an unusually able and efficient Minister. A soldier of marked ability, he understood and liked soldiers and they admired, liked and respected him.

The immediate outcome of all this was the issuing, on March 27, of the famous Army Order 88 of 1914. As an historic document, and as one that may have far-reaching consequences in the future, it is worth full quotation, and is as follows :

Discipline.

1. No officer or soldier should in future be questioned by his superior officer as to the attitude he will adopt or as to his action in the event of his being required to obey orders dependent on future or hypothetical contingencies.

2. An officer or soldier is forbidden in future to ask for assurances as to orders which he may be required to obey.

3. In particular it is the duty of every officer and soldier to obey all lawful commands given to them through the proper channel, either for the safeguarding of public property, or the support of the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty, or for the protection of the lives and property of the inhabitants in the case of disturbance of the peace.

All this was highly injurious to the Army. The resignations of men like Lord French and General Ewart, at any time a misfortune, were in the special circumstance little less than a calamity.

And these alarums and excursions had at least one further result that must be recorded. Sir John Cowans immediately went to his colleagues on the Army Council who had resigned and offered to resign with them. The gesture was instinctive and characteristic. Only the wise and patriotic advice of Lord French and General Ewart dissuaded him. It was very earnestly pointed out to him that for the whole Army Council to resign would do incalculable harm by magnifying a disagreement between two of its members and the Cabinet into a quarrel between the Civil and Military powers.

Thus did an acute political incident not only have grave effects at home, but it undoubtedly had vast international consequences, and these had far from subsided before the War was upon us. It deprived the Army Council of its experienced Civil head and two of its most distinguished members at a time when their services would have been invaluable to the country. All through the War General Ewart was quite needlessly side-tracked in the Scottish command,and there is no doubt that only the magnanimous outlook of his colleagues saved to the country the great services of Cowans as Quartermaster-General.

The weary political wrangle dragged on. Summoned to Council by the Sovereign himself, the disputants failed to find a basis for agreement and the outbreak of disaster in Europe found them quarrelling on the very steps of the Throne.

CHAPTER VII

1912-1914 (*Continued*)

Personal characteristics—A self-made man—Independence—Calculated indiscretions—Attitude towards women—Love of laughter and fun—Schoolboyish tricks—Great man of business—Extremely hard worker—Powers of sleeping—Grasp of essentials—Prompt and fearless decisions—The one indispensable soldier of the War—Simple tastes—How men admired him—Never once rattled during the War—Unerring choice of subordinates—Shrewdness in council—Tact—Decision—An amusing story—Love of children, youth and flowers—An indiscreet remark—Audacity—Hatred of Pharisees—Was he great?—Capacity for drudgery—Not a plaster saint—Yachting in the Mediterranean—Amusing incidents—Monte Carlo—Rome—"Lovely Ladies."

With wallets twain almighty Jove
Has saddled all mankind;
Our neighbours' failings hang before,
Our own faults hang behind.

—PLATO.

IT will be convenient if we pause here for the purpose of looking more directly at the subject of this biography.

At the early age of fifty-two, in the prime of his mental and physical strength, with an enormous capacity for both work and play, absolutely independent and fearless, he is a Major-General of four years' standing, a senior Member of the Army Council and, as an officer on the Administrative Staff, can hope for no higher post than the great one of Quartermaster-General which he holds.

It might, it is true, be followed by the offer of the gilded obscurity of some minor Colonial Governorship as an easy transition to civil retirement. But that was a prospect unlikely to attract so sanguine and active a temperament.

Cowans had reached his high position solely through his own abilities, qualities and hard work. He had no influential family connections, very little money and no capacity for climbing back stairs. Open and straightforward, he disdained diplomacy, or at any rate the variety that uses flattery and servility as a weapon. Indeed he was independent to the point of indiscretion—some would go further and say to the point of foolishness—in the pursuit of pleasure and social relaxation.

Of indiscretion in professional affairs he was often accused. His nature was far too open, gregarious and sympathetic to permit him to freeze questioners with the pompous secrecy of the third-rate official. It is true that during the War the ubiquitous person who always knew everything frequently quoted as his (or her) authority the Quartermaster-General, the probability being that they did not even know him! Cowans often deliberately volunteered or gave information for good reasons of his own.

In the autumn of 1914, for example, an old brother officer, a soldier of high rank and the utmost discretion, asked if it were true that mobilisation and the despatch of the Expeditionary Force had gone through without a single hitch. Cowans replied not quite, and related how, owing to a misunderstanding, the Devons had been mislaid and were discovered after the lapse of some ten days at Jersey. This was true, but not the whole truth, as we shall see later. It is an admirable example of the

Photo by] *[Vandyke.*

General Sir John Cowans in Robes of the Bath.

Vol. I., p. 226.

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calculated indiscretion, a method dear to Cowans and one he constantly practised all his life. He was friendly and open and told his questioner a little; by doing so he prevented further questions, gave gossip something to appease it (if that can be done) and, above all, avoided presenting himself or his work as impeccable.

The manner in which a man reacts to women is the acid test of character. It cannot, therefore, be ignored, even were it desirable to do so. Were an inhabitant of Mars to read some contemporary biographies he would be forced to conclude that on this planet men had neither mothers, wives, nor women friends. He would form the opinion that they budded off from each other after the manner of apple trees; that they were what is foolishly described in certain American circles as one hundred per cent male and that they lived and died like automatons. If a book is described as merely an account of a man's work such an omission may be allowable, although even that is questionable; should it, however, claim to present the man as well as his achievements, it is merely futile. After all, in the most primal and vital sense a man is largely what his mother, his home and his women friends make him.

Cowans, as who does not, found in women a source of refreshment and renewed energy, and if he did not always turn to the most refined and cultivated he shared that weakness, if it be one, with men even greater than himself. Intercourse with women of an inferior type does a thinker harm, but seems to be necessary to, and to energise men of action.

One of the most manly of men, Cowans had a large slice of the feminine in him. That is to say he had been transmitted an ample and vigorous share of his mother,

and this gave him that intuition which was invaluable to him in his career in that it made him an unerring judge of character. It simplified all his intercourse with women, who never felt any need to explain things to him. He had indeed to a most unusual degree what the Psalmist aptly defines as an understanding heart. Women were happy with him just exchanging ideas. He had the gift of making them feel not only at ease with him but at their best; even ordinary women felt when in his company that they were quite clever. In fact the measure of understanding and sympathy he gave them made women of all ages and ranks adore him.

He did not dislike this popularity. It might truly be said of him as it has been of Wellington: "He was not without vanity of a certain description . . . not without frailty, for he was a man." [1]

A wise, witty, observant sympathetic woman of the world who knew him extremely well writes:

"One of his most noticeable points, and which had for me a great charm, was his buoyancy and resilience; the utter absence of anything approaching self-pity. When desperately overworked he would never say one word of complaint. If he found that no effort on his part to be talkative and amusing was demanded and that he was met with quiet, gentle sympathy—more often than not without words—he would gradually revive and respond with such loving gratitude for the understanding of his needs.

"Injudicious criticism stultified him. He was so individual that he was apt to resent any check to the direct pursuit of his object. Any attempt to modify his

[1] *A History of the British Army* by J. W. Fortescue. Vol. X. p. 224.

views, therefore, had to be made very quietly, very tentatively—but once you had his ear, his splendid, clear reasoning was brought to bear. This is my personal experience of him, and it would not apply altogether to his work, for there one of his leading characteristics was the capacity for listening to anything worth hearing while all the time forming his own opinion.

"He longed to take the field against the Germans. He discussed it with me—but he knew that his gifts for organisation were more needed at home in just the direction in which they were employed. . . ."

Another woman, who also knew him well, formed this impression of him. It is quoted as typical of many similar letters:

"I should say his great attraction for women was that he really loved them all—and understood them—their little ways and weaknesses—and that he couldn't bear to hurt them. He *did* of course, but one felt that he never did it deliberately.

"'His tenderness as well as his sense of humour was irresistible. There was an 'Oh, but I love you too' attitude about him always which melted the stoniest, and yet with it all he was big and strong and had such a wonderful brain. A man's strength and woman's intuition combined I should say. . . . He was so lovable that you had to forgive him—and he had 'ways'—I shall never forget him buttoning his coat with me inside when I'd helped him on, about the second time we had met. As he put in the second arm he turned facing me as one does, opened both sides of the coat wide, buttoned me up inside it, roaring with laughter! In anyone else I should have thought it awful cheek, but there are people

who can do these things and be liked for them and others who most certainly cannot do them. . . ."

It may be that women forgave him too much, and too easily, with the result that in later years he became more and more irresponsible where they were concerned.[1] But that is woman's way ; she does not punish a man for falling below her standard, but for falling below his own.

Yet that was, after all, only one side of Jack Cowans. There was one goddess to whom he was ever faithful, and that was his work. There was in his character an underlying wistfulness that longed for a real understanding and appreciation of his work and aims, an understanding prompted by affection rather than by technical knowledge (for many of course gave him professional appreciation) ; in a word, he longed to be loved for his work, and for his single-hearted devotion to it.

In spite of all the sophistication of the society in which he came to live, he was a man of very simple tastes. His amusements were never highly intellectual. He was not a great reader of books and his appreciation of art did not go beyond a liking for Farquharson's pictures of sheep in the snow.

There was an intimate personal quality in him that made men as well as women love him even when they did not quite approve of him. He had his enemies and detractors, as what man or woman of personality has not. He was, however, without any capacity for arousing

[1] Wellington's relations with women were a subject for endless gossip. "It must be admitted that they were numerous and, with two or three notable exceptions, not of a kind on which it profits to dwell. Unlike many men who have played great parts in the world's history, Wellington never submitted his will to a woman's ; although very susceptible of the influence of beauty and wit, he treated women either as agreeable companions or as playthings. He never allowed them to control his actions." (Maxwell's *Life of Wellington*, Vol. II.)

hatred and it was almost impossible to be successfully rude to him because, as has already been noted, from his earliest years he only laughed at all such attempts. This inherent winning quality, so elusive that it escapes definition, but so unmistakable when once encountered, impelled even people who knew him only slightly to feel they might call him "Jack," and it greatly smoothed his path in life. It made him, too, well-nigh irresistible to women, and perhaps it amused him a little to see how easily he could melt their hearts towards him, even when they were determined to look upon him with disapproval.

He loved laughter and all his life he remained a boy. Women recognised this boyishness as much as men, probably without analysing it, and they forgave him much for the sheer joyousness and gaiety of his outlook, just enjoying the refreshment it gave in a world that is apt to take itself too seriously. Those who knew him best treated him as a delightful schoolboy—impulsive, warm-hearted and full of fun. It was the schoolboy in him that would make him enliven a dull house-party by collecting the fire-irons out of the bedrooms and sending them hurtling down the stairs on a tin tray; that would make him ring up a friend at three in the morning and drive him frantic by putting to the mouthpiece of the telephone a favourite cigar-box which played a tune; that would make him appear in a violent red tie as a sign of rebellion when he thought his superiors disapproved of him. And it was women who were able to understand how he could not bear to have all this mischievousness taken seriously—possibly because they so often hate being taken seriously themselves.

Then he was primarily a man of business: what is popularly called a born Captain of Industry and, like

all good captains from Napoleon downwards, he could not only work immensely hard himself whenever it was necessary, but he had a dominating capacity for getting the best and hardest work out of others.

He had that extraordinary power of sleeping at will which goes with the highest form of concentration, and this enabled him to work at intense pressure and yet stand the strain. His grasp of the essentials of a problem was instantaneous and unerring, and was followed by unhesitating action, for he was utterly fearless of responsibility.

Indeed, his peculiar genius was so great that its claim for recognition overrode all prejudice created against him by his minor indiscretions. This undoubtedly caused jealousy at times, for there who were those were indignant, perhaps not unnaturally, that he should do exactly as he chose, defying the conventions and often the proprieties, and yet find himself appointed to important posts, just because no other could have filled them so well.

That this should have been so was the greater tribute to his powers. For Jack Cowans will go down in history as being the one indispensable soldier of the War, not only because of his innumerable good and fine qualities, but in spite of what many considered his less admirable ones.

He became a Fellow of the Zoological Society, having been proposed by his old friend Mr. Percival Harter, in 1904, and it was his simplicity that made him fond of visiting the monkey-house at the Zoo, for he loved animals, though he hated wasps. A friend of his tells of the great relaxation and rest he found in frequent visits to the Zoo during the War. While watching the animals and birds every trouble would fade from his face, every trace of preoccupation and care vanish, and for the time

being he was a boy again, totally oblivious of the world.

Although he liked making new friends, and was perhaps not above making acquaintances who could be of service to him, he never forgot old friends whoever they might be.

We have seen how in his very earliest years he showed that marked inability to quarrel which so helped him all through life. He could get on famously with all sorts of people, and throughout his career his relations with superiors and subordinates were notable for unchanging cordiality and warmth.

A self-made man in the best sense he was always accessible, and while gossip might laugh at Duchesses thronging the corridors of the War Office in order to get him to help the innumerable protégés which a popular fiction always credits them with possessing, he was as ready to receive and be courteous to a charwoman as a Royal Highness, and to help an Army Service Corps private as a Royal Duke. His tireless pen answered the letter of one as promptly, courteously—and briefly—as it did the other. Whenever his old nurse visited him at the War Office everyone, no matter who they were, had to wait till she took her leave.

Women, however much they might appreciate his admiration of them as individuals, instinctively felt and were proud of the fact that he admired, respected and believed in their capacity as a sex to accomplish great things.

Yet, however pleasant and even valuable it may be to a man to win and keep the admiration and friendships of women, it is by his men contemporaries that he must finally be judged. And these speak with no uncertain voice. Out of the hundreds of letters received by the

writers of this book, from scores of personal interviews and the perusal of private letters and documents, there are only three instances in which any doubt is expressed as to the value of the man and his work, and in his whole career there is only one example of his hating anyone. These exceptions will be dealt with later in their proper places.

There is an extraordinary unity and volume of opinion as to his faithfulness and loyalty, and his men friends of all ages were numerous, devoted, indeed, it may be said, affectionate.

He was remarkably clear-headed and had extraordinary powers of organisation, inherited and acquired. His coolness and self-control were remarkable and he was without nerves. Mr. Asquith, a privileged and exceptionally acute observer, says that although he had seen Kitchener break down twice during the War he had never seen Cowans even rattled. Many others confirm this. But then Kitchener tried to do everything himself, and Cowans all his life wisely deputed every bit of authority he could. He clearly laid down the lines within which he wished his subordinates to work; this done he gave them an absolutely free hand; he trusted them; they returned his confidence and in consequence he obtained —results. If he found a man inefficient he cleared him out, yet was fond of saying he liked a man whose weak points he knew because he could then strengthen him with a suitable colleague and so never find himself unexpectedly let down.

None of his qualities stood him in such good stead as his capacity to choose his subordinates. We have already seen many examples. When War was declared in 1914 he seemed able to put his hand on the ideal man for every

job. It was at such moments that his professional skill, backed by his wide acquaintanceship, his tolerant comprehension of men and his knowledge of the world made his choice almost perfect. Many more examples of this will appear later ; it is only necessary to mention now the summoning to his side during the War men like General Stuart-Wortley (Lieutenant-General the Honourable Sir Richard Stuart-Wortley, [1] K.C.B.), General Crofton Atkins (Major-General Sir Alban Crofton Atkins, K.C.B.), and the posting to Southampton, very soon after War broke out, of a man like General Balfour (Brigadier-General Sir Alfred Balfour, K.B.E.).

Mr. Tennant (the Right Honourable Harold J. Tennant, P.C.), who as Financial Secretary to the War Office and afterwards as Under-Secretary of State for War had exceptional opportunities of judging, speaks of his " unerring faculty " for choosing the best men to do any piece of work. This faculty Mr. Tennant rightly considers a most uncommon one.

He was shrewd and quiet in Council and knew when to hold his tongue. Taking a broad point of view, his opinions and advice on the work of his fellow-members of the Army Council was often very valuable, but he never gave it or interfered in any way unless asked to do so.

The theory of War or—whatever may be said to the contrary—of Politics or Diplomacy was beyond Cowans ; his mind was a purely practical one and he rejoiced in getting things done. He had little patience with obstacles in the way of routine, precedent or custom ; red tape he hated, and his short cuts may at times have outraged the ritualist and subjected him to stupid accusations

[1] General Stuart-Wortley succeeded General MacMunn as Q.M.G in India in March, 1924.

of wire-pulling and jobbery. Anything he ever did, and he did much, was far too direct and open to merit either name.

His tact never deserted him—or at least only once, as we shall see later. His masculine, tolerant mind always enabled him to appreciate the other fellow's point of view. He had the reputation of being a good officer with troops, and there can be no doubt of his innate capacity for leading men.

Shrewd and quick, rather than brilliant, he seemed to grasp a problem with his senses rather than with his mind. He could not originate a scheme, but give him one and he would amplify, improve and carry it out with wonderful energy and success.

Above all, and this has already been commented on by others who knew him well, he had the priceless quality of decision that seems to desert or never to be developed by the average official. He examined the problem, gave his decision and stood by it. The measure and quality of his judgment is perhaps that only once in his whole career had he to own to an error, and that was in a minor matter. That his desire to help others may have at times outrun his discretion is another matter. If it be a grave fault it is at least a generous one and is all too rare.

An amusing story is recorded of his early days at the War Office. An old friend coming into his office found him endorsing a minute for action in that clear, legible handwriting of his. Horrified—or pretending to be—he said, "Giving a decision! How foolish! Whether you are right, or whether you are wrong, you will live to regret it." But Cowans always made up his mind and his life was too full to leave time for regrets.

His mind was, in some respects, commonplace, but it was eager, alert, and above all it was allied to a strong will, great powers of concentration consistently employed from boyhood, and considerable ambition.

He was not calculating; but he had a keen sense of who were useful people and a great gift of choosing the right friends; and his servants were devoted to him. He loved children and young people and they him; and allied to his love of youth was his love of flowers. During the War he could find rest and refreshment in taking the children of a friend out to luncheon.

Cowans learned all he knew of life, and it was much, from life itself. On his intellectual side, however, he was more developed than people guessed. He loved music, had inherited a voice from his mother, and in his boyhood was quite a good singer. Never a great churchgoer, when he did attend he liked to hear fine singing and music. Indeed, at one period of his career, ornate services attracted him a good deal, and the point has significance in view of after events.

He could be indiscreet and make remarks that were better left unsaid. But he was never malicious, mean or ill-natured. It was only himself he did harm to when it was correctly reported that he said a certain Cabinet Minister "had the brains of a rabbit." The sting was in its truth, and, as the person in question is said to be even vainer than the average politician, the remark has never been forgiven.

It has been said that he managed his personal finances badly and there is a measure of truth in the accusation. But he was never a rich man and no British soldier, whatever his rank, will leave much money behind out of savings from his army pay.

To the average man and woman the two most appealing things about Cowans were his unfailing sympathy and helpfulness. General Bird (Major-General Wilkinson Dent Bird, C.B.), Director of Staff Duties at the War Office during the War, writes of him as being "without exception kind and sympathetic."

This was the universal experience. Another outstandingly attractive quality was that he had much of that gusto for life which, rightly or wrongly, we associate with the Elizabethan period. It also is a quality that will always appeal to the British peoples.

Cowans knew well that he possessed great business capacity; he was a comparatively young man and full of vigour and energy in 1914 and could quite reasonably and legitimately look forward to retiring early on a full pension and devote himself for ten or fifteen years to making money. Every retired soldier who is not a rich man has to do so—or go and exist in Cheltenham.

Had the War not broken his health his intentions would have been fulfilled to the letter. Even as things turned out he put up at the end a gallant fight.

§ 2

There was something of the imp, a great deal of the gamin, in him. He was full of audacity and loved to shock solemn, pompous people and often went out of his way to do so if he suspected in them a spice of the Pharisee. There was nothing of it in himself, and it speaks well for human nature that in a censorious world those who have considered it their duty to sit in judgment on him are so unbelievably few as to be negligible. His life was a most striking example of the saying, "Judge not, that ye be

not judged." He never stood on the pillar of the perfect, nor yet sat in the seat of the scornful, and the measure of his charity has since been meted out to him by others.

He was the friend and comrade of all. His salient quality was humanness, and in the world of human beings generous allowances will always be made for any man or woman who richly displays this, the greatest of all characteristics.

Had he greatness? The question is not easy to answer. He certainly had many if not all the qualities essential to greatness. His brain was not of the first order, that is, it was not creative; but, immediately below this, it would take a very high place indeed.

He displayed during and more particularly towards the end of the War, qualities of tenaciousness, doggedness, an unalterable clinging to what he believed to be the right course and a power of accepting unending drudgery of which there are few hints in his earlier career. It was clear that he was big enough to wear success modestly; he would possess the palm; but he was not afraid of the dust and heat. It is an even more conclusive evidence of greatness that he could shoulder reverses with a smile; accept unmerited disappointments with philosophy, and never allow jealousy, enmity, or the bitter pin-pricks of the envious to sour his native sweetness.

Added to his wide tolerance, rich humanity, comradeship for men, unfailing gentleness to women, love of children, flowers and animals and ceaseless devotion to duty, he had courtesy, magnaminity, courage: these are not little things. Perhaps his character was superior to his intellect yet, happily, he was not without failings. As one who knew him well and loved him well has said, "Thank God, he was no plaster saint."

§ 3

In the spring of 1913, Cowans went for a long cruise in the Mediterranean with the late Sir James Pender and Lady Pender on board their beautiful yacht *Lamorna*.

A short time previously he had, as we have seen, perfected his Horse Registration Scheme, and he had a typed copy of it with him on board. Full of his new idea he discussed it a good deal with his host and hostess who were old and very intimate friends. Everyone on the yacht was keenly interested and said laughingly that the scheme was excellent but that the horses did not exist or, if they did, at the moment of Registration, would vanish into thin air on the outbreak of a war. Cowans stuck tenaciously to his point and insisted that he would, in case of emergency, be able to put his hand on every single one of them and the sequel proved that, as usual, he was right.

The fact was that even those who were his great admirers and had a profound belief in his ability and capability for strenuous work were often, as on this occasion, misled by the optimistic outlook of the man and the light-hearted casualness with which he treated his own achievements. A man of inferior ability who takes himself seriously often succeeds in making people accept him at a far higher than his real valuation. Cowans was so direct and sincere that he had absolutely no capacity for playing to the gallery.

A characteristic incident on the lighter side may perhaps be related here.

If Cowans made up his mind to do anything he had the most uncanny gift for making other people think they wanted to do it too. Both Sir James and Lady

Pender were well known in yachting circles as keen sailors. Sir James had owned a yacht from the time he was a subaltern at Gibraltar in the sixties, and amongst others had owned such famous boats as *Kariad*, *Brynhild I.*, *Brynhild II.* and, of course, *Lamorna*. He had won racing trophies in every part of the world including two King's Cups at Cowes—one of them being King Edward VII. Coronation Cup—the Kaiser's Challenge Cup at Kiel and others too numerous to mention. He could skipper his own boat, and both he and Lady Pender thoroughly enjoyed hard weather. As real yachtsmen they rather looked down on fair-weather sailors.

Cowans, on the other hand, considered it a sinful waste to be in the Mediterranean in May and not to go to Monte Carlo. Very rough weather had been experienced between Malta and Majorca and, as every sailor knows well, in the Mediterranean it can blow hard.

To compensate the ladies of the party for storm-tossed hair and oil-skins they were given a day at Monte Carlo in order to air their smartest frocks. Of course the rooms were visited and Cowans there (as everywhere) met innumerable friends and acquaintances. He persuaded his host and hostess, who of course really felt no such thing, that their one desire was to lie at Mentone for several days in order that he should fulfil endless attractive social engagements in Monte Carlo and the neighbourhood. Everyone on board did what pleased Cowans and—wonder of wonders—everyone was quite convinced that they were pleasing themselves.

The cruise was then continued just sufficiently long to allow those on board to forget that lying at Mentone is not real yachting before Cowans made his next move. He, having first secretly inflamed the younger members of

the party with the wonder of Rome, announced one night after dinner that the only thing required to make a perfect cruise unforgettable was a few days in the capital of Italy. The older people jibbed hard at this. They were wedded to the comfort of their own beds and servants and had a profound distrust of Italian cooks. Moreover, they were on a yachting trip; they had no motor; Italian railways were horrible; Italian art galleries chilly; Italian hotels in the season ruinously expensive—and the yacht would be eating its head off in harbour.

Needless to say Cowans in the end prevailed, and against their wish and judgment the whole party found themselves aboard the launch followed by the cutter full of luggage speeding into the dirty basin of Civita Vecchia Harbour. Their luggage was seized from the sailors by noisy Italians before their astonished eyes: they were bundled into a filthy train—and that night slept in Rome.

Under the diplomatic guidance of Cowans the party decided (or thought they decided) that they did not want to spend *all* the time sight-seeing.

He had undertaken the Staff work; the Grand Hotel was, of course, headquarters, and everything was beautifully managed. Obviously a visit to the Vatican Galleries was obligatory; this everyone felt was a necessary concession to Mr. Murray and Messrs. Cook. Cowans led the way. The slummy streets around the Vatican were traversed in dusty carriages. Saint Peter's was inspected, and then, their souls athirst for a sight of the Apollo Belvedere, innumerable steps were climbed and—at last—the party stood before the statue the serene beauty of which has drawn pilgrims to Rome for many more years than has St. Peter's itself. An elderly, not very

widely-travelled, but intensely respectable and conventional lady of the party put on her horn-rimmed spectacles, glared round fiercely for one unbelievable moment, asked if *all* the statues were so shamelessly unclothed as those in her immediate neighbourhood, then, without waiting for an answer, seized a chair, turned it resolutely away from the gallery so that she faced the doorway, fiercely put up her red parasol and, to the astonishment of the attendants, sat down, snorting violently!

Not even Cowans could move her. She demanded indignantly of all and sundry why she had ever left Christian Scotland; railed loudly against the godless old man who had thousands—yes thousands—of naked men and women in one room—together—and demanded to be led back instantly to the chaste retirement of her cabin on board the *Lamorna!*

Her husband, a Scottish Peer, and almost as cultivated as she was, announced determinedly that now he was in the Vatican he was going to get value for his money and see the Sistine Chapel or die in the attempt. So while his outraged spouse sat unsuspectingly under a naked Disc Thrower in the Sculpture Gallery with her parasol held closely down over her head, her husband, followed by three or four of the enthusiastic and much amused juniors, made for the Sistine Chapel at the double in order not to keep his furious lady in shameful bondage longer than was absolutely necessary.

What the Presbyterian Peer had expected to see when he reached the Chapel goodness only knows. What he did see was scores of people in all sorts of angles, some prone on their backs, staring up at a high ceiling. He put his perspiring nose inside the door for fully five seconds, shouted at the top of his voice, "This is a

horrible place—nothing to be seen—nothing——" and darted back to his furious lady.

Undismayed by these (or any other) happenings, Cowans next announced that he invited everyone to a grand dinner party at which would be present two of the most lovely ladies in Rome, a Principessa and a Marchesa. The lady of the statues did not much approve of Principesse or Marchese or indeed of any foreigner, felt sure that anyhow their titles were assumed, and that whatever their rank all Italian women looked to her unwashed. She was assured that one lady was English and the other American, but far from being mollified tartly remarked that she disliked all women "who married foreigners for their petty titles."

All the same she was not going to be outdone by any female foreigner. So she appeared on the evening of the dinner party at the stroke of eight o'clock in a high-necked, long-sleeved black dress with a train such as the wife of a Scottish Peer of the utmost respectability would naturally consider suitable for a foreign hotel. As it was a festive occasion a bunch of red poppies had been fastened, apparently without the aid of maid or mirror, in her hair, and a few pinned on her modestly-clothed bosom.

Cowans was late; the Italian ladies were late; the young people were amused at the comedy and, it must be confessed, sniggered. After a long delay the great glass doors were opened and Cowans rushed forward to greet his lovely ladies. Introductions were made; civil things were said; the red poppies nodded with annoyance and, most noticeable of all, the wearer's poor nose almost rivalled them owing to several weeks in the Mediterranean and a rooted disapproval of face-cream or powder.

J. S. C.'s lovely ladies, having discarded their cloaks, advanced.

For a moment the face of the Scottish Peeress almost blanched—that is to say all but her nose. She thought for one awful instant that she was back in the Vatican Galleries. The first lady was—clothed—in a beautiful string of pearls, a wisp of chiffon, an arum lily and such modesty as fashion had left her ; the second lady wore more jewels but rather less chiffon. The poppies danced with outraged virtue, and their now thoroughly angry wearer turned to the frightened Scottish Peer and said in the voice of Justice speaking on the Day of Judgment, " Roderick, the lift."

No one in the world but Cowans could do such things and be forgiven. The next day the lady's outraged conventionality recovered under his amazing chaff and that faint note of deference he so often displayed to elderly women, and a perfectly harmonious party in due course rejoined the *Lamorna* at Civita Vecchia, and so back to Marseilles.

CHAPTER VIII

1914

Attitude towards politics—Supports decentralisation—Treasury control of expenditure—An apt rejoinder—His Majesty's appreciation—Revises horse registration scheme—Forms voluntary army horse reserve—Expenditure on Social Reform, and the Navy compared—Cowans perfects the machine—Mr. Asquith quoted—Functions of the Committee of Imperial Defence—Cowans's relationships thereto—War preparations—Aircraft and petrol revolutionise War—Lord Haldane leaves the War Office—Mobilisation period shortened—Expeditionary Force programme tested—Men who made the plan—A Commander's indebtedness to his Staff—Sir William Pitcairn Campbell's view—The British Army's perfect piece of Staff work—First days of War preparation—Sunday, August 2—Lord Haldane and Sir Edward Grey at dinner—The Red Despatch Box—It is War?—Monday, August 3—Fateful Army Council meeting—Mobilisation ordered—Inside the War Office—Outside in Whitehall—A Cockney's view of the Government—Territorials cause mobilisation delay—First troops leave Southampton—Another serious delay—Fog fights for the Germans—Q.M.G. hurries to Southampton—The fog lifts—The Fourth Division embarks—The Navy—Sir Julian Corbett quoted—Mercantile Marine—The Q.M.G.'s many preoccupations—Mr. Churchill's tribute—The Expeditionary Force reaches its War stations.

To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace.—GEORGE WASHINGTON.

COWANS was essentially English in his make-up ; that is, he was first and last a practical man with little intellectual training and small regard for theory, but with much character, great shrewdness in affairs, large tolerance, good

sense of proportion and most tenacious of what he judged to be the main point.

When he became Q.M.G. he therefore wasted no time or energy or risked making difficulties and enemies by criticising the policy of the Government. There it was; he accepted it loyally as a good soldier should, and as far as ever he could within the limits laid down he perfected the equipment of the Army and its transport and supplies.

He was not really an economist in the sense, for example, that Lord Kitchener was. That is, he did not instinctively limit himself to just so much expenditure as would effect his purpose. Nevertheless he had inherited business instincts and was proud of and congratulated himself on the fact. On one occasion, for instance, he accompanied Sir Charles Harris, G.B.E., the Assistant Financial Secretary of the War Office, to inspect Deptford Cattle Market as a possible Supply Depot, and with pride pointed out some cast-iron floor plates there, bearing the name of his father's firm.

Cowans had no sooner taken his seat in the big room in the south-west corner of the War Office with its outlook on Inigo Jones's Banqueting House and William Kent's Horse Guards, than he got to work.

A friend of his, a General Officer, who knew him well, writes:

"On his appointment as Quartermaster-General I had a conversation with him in which he foreshadowed changes that he intended to work for in the War Office. They were largely in the direction of limiting the control of the civil servants and placing the organisation more in the hands of soldiers. He saw clearly the delays and waste involved by unnecessary returns and correspondence, and hoped to see far more power left in the

hands of the General Officers Commanding-in-Chief. The War, however, frustrated any plans he may have formed in this direction."

This idea of decentralising was characteristic and, needless to say, extremely sound. As a matter of fact, when the War did come, in 1914, one of the first things found essential was to give more power to the Commanders-in-Chief in the Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, Aldershot, London District, Scottish and Irish Commands.

Had circumstances given Cowans sufficient time to mature his plans, the situation that arose in the various Commands immediately after the outbreak of war need not have been so hopeless as it was. Had the Commanders-in-Chief got into the way of acting on their own initiative more, had Command Headquarters, prior to August, 1914, been transformed from a mere Post Office to the actual scene and seat of power and initiative in the area, then hundreds of thousands of men need not have spent quite the miserable winter most of them did in 1914-15.

Scattered in tents on sites too often badly chosen, up to their knees in mud and water, without military clothing and insufficiently equipped as regards cooking and messing gear, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief had too often to waste precious time in obtaining War Office departmental sanction for actions it should have been well within his powers to take on his own. Very often, speaking strictly, the power was actually his but custom and groove are almost omnipotent, and because of the Treasury policy of centralising all expenditure many matters were submitted that need not have been. Cowans of course knew and freely admitted that such

control was necessary and desirable in time of peace. Immediately he became Quartermaster-General he realised that in time of war it might become a fatal embarrassment, and that was why from the first moment his mind was concentrated on the problem of decentralisation.

But to return to 1912.

The appointment of Cowans to the great position of Quartermaster-General at the early age of fifty had not been received without a measure of criticism. As has been pointed out, Lord Haldane made him Director-General of the Territorial Force on the advice of soldiers.. The higher appointment would never have been criticised by a soldier, not even by the old-fashioned sort who considered experience of active service as an essential qualification for advancement. But there were political opponents of the Government who felt in duty bound to criticise any appointment made by Lord Haldane and they, of course, had their say.

Such things left Cowans quite unmoved, and his capacity for receiving criticism with a winning smile or some disarming chaff stood him, as ever, in good stead. There is a story, probably apocryphal, relating how a distinguished personage had twitted the new Quartermaster-General with being too young to be a member of the Army Council, whereupon Cowans said laughingly, "I assure you, sir, there are occasional mornings when I feel quite old enough for anything."

When Cowans became Director-General of the Territorial Force he was very little, if at all, known to the King. The appointment, however, brought him to some extent into contact with His Majesty; this intercourse naturally grew closer and more frequent when he became Quartermaster-General and a member of the Army

Council. With personal knowledge of Cowans and his work, His Majesty's appreciation increased and, at the end, no one could have had a higher sense of the value of his great achievements.

The actual reorganisation of the Territorial Force had of course been practically completed by Sir Douglas Haig, by Major-General Sir Gerald Ellison, K.C.M.G., and Sir Henry Mackinnon, before Cowans took over; but, as we know, Lord Haldane had found him invaluable in consolidating their work.

Having decided that he had found the best man for the post of Quartermaster-General, he defended him on all occasions and made no secret of his firm belief that Cowans was indispensable. It is true that on at least one occasion the Secretary of State considered it his duty personally to remonstrate with Cowans about the extent of his social activities but, far from being either apologetic, contrite or evasive, Cowans put up quite a good case and Lord Haldane was completely satisfied.

If his decentralising schemes did not advance as he desired, anything over which Cowans had complete control moved with the utmost rapidity.

§ 2

While Director-General of the Territorial Force Cowans had, as we know, done his utmost to evolve a comprehensive scheme for the supply of horses needed both for the Force itself and for the Army. His hands were so tied by financial considerations that the utmost he could achieve was unsatisfactory. When he became Quartermaster-General and a member of the Army Council he therefore at once set to work to improve the situation. The

Territorial Force required 86,000 horses on mobilisation and the Expeditionary Force 42,000.

The paper organisation for obtaining them, improvised on the cheap, would, he now felt quite sure, prove inadequate; indeed it would not have found a tenth of the horses for the Regular Army, nor anything effective for the Territorial Force. The Expeditionary Force would want its horses in a few days, and horses fit for work, not dealers' horses or horses from grass. Such horses were part of the agricultural industry of the country. They could only be obtained by impressment.

The steps to be taken were divisible into three stages :

(*a*) Putting the law of impressment, which had not been furnished up for several hundred years, on to a business footing.

(*b*) The legal provision of suitable machinery for viewing horses in time of peace, and for purchase in time of war.

(*c*) The evolution of an adequate system of collection on mobilisation, of conveying information to all concerned, of despatch to destination, and above all of prompt payment, so that ready money should assuage the bitterness of impressment.

Until Cowans became Quartermaster-General, he had not the power to get the full details studied or evolved, but he was determined not to let the grass grow under his feet. The laws with some difficulty were renovated into a working rule. The military authority could call on the magistrates to supply what was wanted, and the magistrates could order the police to carry out the requisition. In effect the requisitioning would be done by the duly appointed military representatives accompanied by the police.

It was also enacted (Army Act 115, etc.) that duly authorised persons might view horses and vehicles (and this applied also to the motor vehicles required by the Army) at convenient hours, and that if admission was refused the magistrates should issue a search warrant. When the time came to give effect to these rules, it is much to the credit of the good temper of England that practically in no case was a search warrant necessary.

Having secured a revision of the Law, Cowans then set to work on the machinery. His first idea was to use his Territorial permanent staff. The Treasury was not likely to give the required permanent Remount Staff readily, and it was important to get on with the job. A police census had already been made, which gave some idea of what was likely to be found, and did indicate that there were enough horses. Indeed the systematic census that followed later showed how surprisingly good the police pioneer work had been.

In certain districts the Territorial Adjutants had taken great interest in the horse question, and Cowans had a circular drawn up explaining the whole policy of horse mobilisation, and stating that the administration would be delegated to the Commands, to the Staffs of which a supervising establishment of Remount Officers would be posted. These Remount Officers would see that the purchasers were told off, and that every unit knew whence it would get its horses, while every purchaser was to know where he had to send them.

The compilation of the lists of horses was to be made by the Adjutants and permanent instructors of the Territorial Force.

The scheme outlined above organised the horse supply for war for the first time in history, and the various

units to be supplied knew when and where, on paper at any rate, the horses would come from. A good deal of scepticism existed in the public mind, and was voiced in the Press, that there were not enough horses to give effect to the distribution required. Cowans, however, was satisfied that his information was right and so events proved.

In drawing up his original and tentative memorandum, he was anxious, if possible, to use the County Associations, so naturally did his mind trend towards decentralisation when such was possible. This first memorandum drafted by himself did actually produce a complete scheme in outline, but as soon as he became Q.M.G. he realised that the major portion of the Territorial Adjutants were not qualified nor had they the time to carry out the census he wanted. Certain of them who had the knowledge and the time and zeal had produced excellent results, but these were the exception. They also resented, to some extent, the extra and often vexatious duty. The Director of Remounts pointed out that it was impossible to separate the provision of horses for the Regular Army from the provision of those for the Territorial Force, and that only one central authority could handle in each district the acquisition and allotment of horses. The original scheme, while giving a clear policy such as never had been given before, was far from equal to meeting the needs of the whole Army.

Cowans readily recognised this and refused to give his guarantee that the horses would be available by the date wanted. He would do so on the earliest possible date, but not yet. As the Secretary of State was anxious to inform Parliament that everything was ready, this attitude produced a desire to acquiesce in providing the establishments wanted.

In 1912 and 1913, the organisation was perfected. In addition to an administrative Remount Officer at the headquarters of each Command already existing, and certain others in the districts, the service was augmented to divide each Command into a fixed number of remount circles, presided over by a Deputy-Assistant Director. Each remount circle contained so many remount districts, and each district was presided over by a district Remount Officer, who was responsible for enumeration, instead of the Territorial Adjutants. The Remount Officer of the Commands, having once got his census or enumeration returns in, was able to allot to each remount circle the number of horses it was to produce. The district Remount Officers kept in touch with the horse population of their circles, while all the paper work of arranging for collection and collecting centres was organised by the Deputy-Assistant Director of Remounts of the circle.

The regulations, which were now codified, directed that the Command should arrange with prominent local gentlemen of suitable knowledge and status, that they should become on mobilisation Remount Purchasers. For this purpose the Deputy-Assistant Director of Remounts of a circle was to keep a despatch-box, for each purchaser, containing lists of stables from which he was to select horses, a time-table showing the number required each day, branding irons, a cheque book for payment, forms for demanding horses from the magistrates, the requisition forms for the magistrates to sign, also instructions authorising the purchasers to obtain an imprest cash account and to incur expenditure on grooms, horse-holders, clerks and premises.

The purchasers also received a definite time-table showing where trucks would be in waiting on each

successive day of mobilisation, and the nature of horses required that day and the destination of the truck. All 1913 the Remount Officers and the Commands worked hard to complete and verify the tentative census that the Territorial Adjutants had made somewhat incompletely and ineffectively, and at last Cowans received such reports that he felt he could give the Army Council and the Secretary of State the guarantee that they were waiting for.

It took some time to obtain and keep, as personnel changed, the number of purchasers, and to explain to them what would be required, and that the Government would pay them salary and expenses while they were at work. At last, however, the country-side realised that it was the general public service, almost a duty that would be required of them, and that they would be able to see fair play to the owners as well as to the State. There were some fourteen hundred purchasers on the rolls when mobilisation took place, while many of the Territorial units found the purchasers for their own horses in places where their doing so would not interfere with the provision of the Expeditionary Force horses.

There was yet one more difficult matter to be settled, and that was the dwindling in national life of the vanner or light draught trotting horse, which the rise of the motor was driving out of existence. These horses were required in large numbers for the artillery, both Regular and Territorial, and also for the transport of the Army. At that time mechanical transport for cross-country artillery had not been evolved. Cowans saw that the artillery type of horse must, if possible, be preserved for essential duties, and be dispensed with where possible for other duties. The National Union of Horse Owners

Associations had been constantly representing that the vanner would disappear unless assisted.

As there was no time to experiment, and action was imperative, Cowans agreed with the proposals put forward by the Remount Department, to subsidise firms who kept horses fit for regular artillery, with an annual bonus of £4. There had existed before a category of horse known as the "registered" horse whereby the Government, in return for a ten shillings annual fee, had a claim on a certain number of horses. It was at first hoped to save this money towards the cost of the reorganised remount system. A further study of the question showed, however, that there was still another aspect of war to be provided for. The Impressment Acts could be used only when there was a national emergency, and when His Majesty in Council had declared such to exist it was necessary to summon Parliament if it were not already sitting.

Parliament would not be likely to accept such an upheaval of civil life for any lesser occasion. In the past the Army had been often required on an occasion less grave than a national emergency within the intention of the Acts. But since peace establishments in horses were kept low, horses for mobilisation for small wars must be found. This occasion had already been provided for so far as men were concerned, by a special section of Army Reserve which men joined voluntarily. The South African War had shown what the Remount Department had always known, that horses fit for war are not found at grass or in the dealers' yards, but in the working life of the country.

It was therefore decided to abolish the misleading name, the "registered" horse, and to form a voluntary

Army Horse Reserve, to be subsidised, and the terms of the agreement to be that the horses could be called out *whenever any section of the Army Reserve could be called up.* It was to consist of the subsidised class at £4 for artillery only, and the general class at ten shillings as before. It was also realised that the Army Horse Reserve could be got at early, in the event of General Mobilisation, and would thus provide the early quotas required while the impressment was getting into swing. The Army Horse Reserve and the Reserve Horse proved a success, but how far the subsidy would fulfil its purpose of keeping the vanner in business life was never proved, so fast did war follow on the preparation for it.

One other great change was approved by Cowans and was ready only in April, 1914. It was represented that no amount of subsidy was likely to keep enough light vanners in civil life to provide the old style of army transport, with four horses to a wagon driven artillery fashion. But there were tens of thousands, nay hundreds of thousands of heavy horses, hardly touched by the development of the lorry, in the life of the country. If all the horsed transport of the Army other than the tactical vehicles could be horsed by a pair of heavies driven from the box, the transport problem so far as horses went would be solved.

Cowans saw the point at once, and the whole of the wagon equipment and harness was reorganised and adapted post-haste. Larger breechings, longer traces, longer poles, bigger swingle-tree bars were required. There were subsidiary advantages. One driver instead of two would be needed, drivers from civil life could drive from the box, while postillion driving needed training, and this followed Cowans's principles that always

aimed at using civilian arts and crafts when possible. Further, two heavy horses would eat less than four light ones, would require less shoeing, and, a very important point, would take up less room on the line of march.

This really great decision has been forgotten, but it alone made horse mobilisation a complete possibility.

So it was not till April, 1914, that, after two years of almost feverish activity, Cowans was able to inform the Army Council and the Secretary of State, that he and his Remount Department were in a position to guarantee complete mobilisation of twenty Divisions and twenty mounted Brigades (the total of the forces of the United Kingdom) and to provide for the wastage of war, while overseas supplies were being obtained and conditioned. And the Secretary of State for War then and there passed on the guarantee in his own name to Parliament.

To Cowans the value of publicity was well known. He wanted to educate both the Army and the public in what was being done, and would be done, to horse the forces. Remount Officers met Horse Owners Associations in many parts of England. Descriptions of the organisation were published in the Press, and explanatory pamphlets and instructions widely circulated. A complete horse movement railway programme was issued confidentially. Scepticism there was of course, since England loves to be sceptical. Lord Esher (the Viscount Esher, G.C.B.) wrote to the Press to say that the Remount Department suffered from two great delusions, the first that it was possible to impress horses in England, the second that there were enough horses to impress even if it were possible.

It is not often given to men to test their own organisations at high pressure. To Cowans and the Remount

Department was to come that occasion, even before they had put the final touches to their machinery. He was to see this mighty organisation which had been built up on his first Territorial Adjutants' scheme, work without hitch and without delay. The horses were all in their places, and over ninety per cent of the purchases were suitable in every way. No unit was a day behind in its programme of preparation for want of horses. The public played the man with great good humour, and the number of appeals to the county courts or other relief machinery against impressment prices were small. Further, the machinery and the horse supply of the kingdom continued to supply horses for large numbers of new formations, before the overseas supplies came to hand. No one acknowledged his mistaken scepticism more freely than Lord Esher. And once again Cowans and his foresight were justified.

§ 3

The European outlook, as we have seen, was very grave, and the Cabinet took what they considered the best methods of dealing with the situation without spending money; hence the "conversations" between Sir Ernest Cassel and Herr Balin; the visit of Lord Haldane to Berlin and Mr. Churchill's proposal of a Naval Holiday in March, 1913.

None of these suggestions were effective. Nevertheless the Government was not in a position to spend money on armament or equipment or even on the improvement of the Army and the Territorial Force, had they so desired.

During the ten years preceding the outbreak of War the country had been committed to an enormous expenditure on Social Reform. Old Age Pensions and National

Insurance had been established and further large expenditure on similar lines was continually being discussed.

The growth of the German Navy had made it quite impossible for ours to stand still; yet even so, in 1914-15 we spent on Social Reform twenty-two millions and on the Navy only eighteen and a quarter millions. This amount, as Mr. Asquith reminds us in his book, *The Genesis of the War*, was the highest Naval vote ever sanctioned by the House of Commons and, in spite of its size, it might be argued that it was belated and insufficient in the sense that it had no effect in curbing the enormous increases in the German Navy.

Whatever military preparations we may have made were completed in 1911, and between that date and 1914 no additions were made to the Army.

Mr. Asquith's *The Genesis of the War*, makes it plain that the broad lines of our defence policy were settled long before June 3, 1912, when Cowans became Quarter-master-General. He writes:

"It would not be an unjust claim to say that the Government had by that date (namely, August, 1909) investigated the whole of the ground covered by a possible war with Germany—the Naval position; possibilities of blockade; the invasion problem; the Continental problem; the Egyptian problem." [1]

This appears to be quite a fair claim on Mr. Asquith's part and one that is now generally admitted.

It is necessary here to say something of the functions of the Committee of Imperial Defence. It was constituted as a consultative body by Lord Balfour, and was, from its inception, lucky in its Secretaries, the first of whom was Rear-Admiral Sir Charles L. Ottley, K.C.M.G.;

[1] Chapter xv., p. 116.

he was succeeded in 1912 by his Assistant Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey (Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Maurice P. A. Hankey, G.C.B.).

It is noteworthy that the first Secretary of the Committee should have been a sailor and the second a marine gunner, and it may well be accountable to a considerable extent for the excellent *liaison* work established between the Navy and the Army.

As a good deal of misunderstanding exists as to the exact functions of the Committee it will be well to describe them in the authoritative words of Mr. Asquith. Addressing the Imperial Conference in 1911, he said:

"The function which it performs is this, that we get by its means the best expert advice obtainable on any particular question or set of questions, and the fact that the politicians are associated with the experts ensures or ought to ensure that the recommendations of the Committee are not merely correct from the technical point of view, but that they are also conformable to the exigencies of practical politics. That is the scope of this Committee."

The Committee, having come to a decision in policy, sub-committees, consisting for the most part only of experts, set about the task of translating them into action. How important, indeed invaluable, the work of the sub-committees was, is clearly apparent from the explanation regarding them which Mr. Asquith also made to the Imperial Conference on the occasion under reference. It has a direct bearing on the task on which Cowans was then engaged. Mr. Asquith said:

"One of the sub-committees of this Committee of Imperial Defence is at the present time arranging for the co-ordination of the action to be taken by all the Government departments at the moment of the outbreak of war.

We have never yet in the United Kingdom had, oddly enough, put down on paper, in such a way that each department knew exactly what it was expected to do, a full statement of their respective functions and duties the moment war was declared. The sub-committee's arrangement is that whenever a war breaks out, however suddenly the news is received, the whole war organisation of the United Kingdom should be put into operation without a moment's delay.

"The naval and military mobilisations and concentrations, if not already complete, will at once be completed; the cables notifying the Dominions and Colonies and diplomatic representatives abroad will at once be taken from their pigeon-holes and despatched; the intelligence system of the Empire will be put on a war footing; cable and Press censorship will be established; vulnerable points, magazines, etc., will receive special attention against treacherous attack; the defences of our ports will be manned, and precautions will be taken to exclude hostile vessels from entering by force or stratagem. This sub-committee is enquiring how those obviously most important and, it may be, vital steps may be taken without friction and without delay."

It is necessary to understand the relationships between the sub-committees and the Army Council, and explain how they affected the activities of Cowans. In the War Office it would first be for the General Staff to work up the general plan and then for the Quartermaster-General to work out his part of the plan. The Committee of Imperial Defence or the Government as a whole, would only be consulted by the War Office if some question of policy arose in working out their plan, or perhaps if there were some difficulty with another Department.

Of course such questions did arise. For example, the question of controlling railways and ports in time of war was of vital importance to the Quartermaster-General. It had been settled in its broad lines before Cowans assumed office. He, however, played a most important part in working out the details of the railway arrangements and was Chairman of a very important railway committee which was set up in the autumn of 1912 to work out a complete Movements Time-table for Mobilisation; to lay down explicitly the full and exact relationships of the various Government Departments in the event of war. It was also to define and lay down clearly the conditions of the Quartermaster-General's control of the railways in war.

Working steadily throughout 1913 and 1914 this most important Committee had completed its work only a very short time before the outbreak of hostilities. Sir Henry Wilson was Director of Military Operations, having succeeded General Sir Spencer Ewart in 1910, and his was the driving force that kept everyone concerned hard at it preparing for war, in the coming of which he so profoundly believed.

At the time of the Agadir incident the organisation of the Administrative Services at the War Office was by no means well advanced; but much valuable work had afterwards been done by General Miles, the then Quartermaster-General.

Brigadier-General G. P. Bourcicault, at that time Director of Supplies, had drawn up a scheme for supplies in war. It took about fifteen months to complete, and was so arranged as to allow for indefinite expansion. It included arrangements for the provisioning of the troops in England, the organisation of big food depots at Birmingham and other places. It was settled that in

case of war Southampton and Dover were to be used as the ports of embarkation for troops and ammunition; Bristol and Avonmouth for mechanical transport; Folkestone for leave and miscellaneous personnel; and Newhaven was given over entirely to Supplies. The latter point was insisted upon by the Directorate so that there should be no interference with regular despatches by the movements of troops.

It had become clear by this time that two forces were going to revolutionise not only the work of the Quarter-master-General but that of the whole Army. They were aircraft and petrol.

The autumn manœuvres, about Cambridge and Newmarket, in the year 1912, were rendered memorable by the first appearance, with our Army, of aeroplanes, and by the use for the first time upon any considerable scale of mechanical transport.

The Supply Directorate, insisting upon the formation of a petrol reserve upon the lines of the Admiralty contract for a naval reserve, was somewhat hampered by opposition from the civil side. Fortunately the War Minister, Lord Haldane, when consulted, at once foresaw the absolute necessity of this measure, if our troops were not to be held up at the overseas ports, and decided accordingly.

The petrol secured, the Q.M.G. insisted on the provision of containers on what then no doubt appeared a gigantic scale. Petrol cannot travel or fly though it can enable men to do so, therefore steel drums, cans and cases in huge numbers were essential. There was great difficulty in getting expenditure sanctioned for such a purpose. The civilian, who had not grasped that it would be a war of supplies—and therefore of petrol—could have been overheard grumbling, "but why waste good money on

such nonsense!" Cowans carried the day: his good-nature, tact and persuasiveness never once deserted him. Probably he had more tussles with the Treasury than any other member of the Army Council, and, far from resenting it, every Treasury Official would gladly admit that he was invariably right.

In order to relieve the pressure which would have undoubtedly overwhelmed the office of the Director of Contracts on the outbreak of war, the Supply Department proposed that all responsibility for a number of contracts for such articles as sugar, jam, butter, margarine, tea, coffee and so on, should be vested in the Department concerned. The difficulty of obtaining approval was not inconsiderable, but the future was amply to justify the decision. At times the flour reserve varied and on at least one occasion, years before the War, was down to as low as thirty-five days' supply for the combined military and civil population. The principle laid down was that the Army should at all times be able to count on a three months' supply for the Home and Expeditionary Forces. This, it was considered, would give an ample margin of time in which to make other arrangements.

It has sometimes been suggested that this was insufficient. It was of course ample. In a population of forty-five million an army of a hundred and seventy thousand men was comparatively small, and it could easily be fed in time of war for a period of three months without in any way seriously infringing on civilian supplies. After all, though it may be packed or prepared a little differently, soldiers eat pretty much the same food as civilians do. All criticism as to the adequacy of our equipment and supplies forget, or are content to ignore, the small size of the Army for which we were preparing.

The arrangements for the movements of the Expeditionary Force by rail, which had been carefully studied by the General Staff, were, as we have seen, considerably accelerated in the years immediately preceding the War, and for this acceleration and for the organisation of the contemplated bases and ports of embarkation, the Quartermaster-General and his Department deserved the utmost credit.

Every detail was perfectly worked out from the moment the unit entrained at the depot until that at which it arrived at Railhead in France.

The War Office was so well organised at the time that there was little overlapping of responsibility as between the different branches.

The Adjutant-General's Department was charged with the duty of mobilising the personnel of each unit at home at its peace station, and the Quartermaster-General's with the task of providing horses, transport, equipment and supplies and of transporting the Expeditionary Force, when mobilised, to the ports of embarkation. Everyone during this period worked splendidly at his own particular task in connection with the preparations for the despatch of an Expeditionary Force and, when the day of trial came, the results exceeded even the most sanguine expectations.

No one would be readier than Cowans to admit that all these preparations owed a great deal to his immediate predecessor, General Miles.

§ 4

Lord Haldane says that in 1906, "a careful enquiry made disclosed that in order to put even 80,000 men on

the Continent, a period which might be well over two months was the minimum required."

Every department at the War Office was continuously engaged on the problem, not only of reducing this period of preparation for its own department, but by exact and careful co-ordination with other departments assisting in arriving at an all round reduction.

Nothing was more important than that the movements of the Adjutant-General's and the Quartermaster-General's Branches should be equally rapid. It was useless the Quartermaster-General arranging to transport the troops with celerity if the Adjutant-General could not mobilise rapidly.

One of the principal measures taken to this end must therefore be recorded. While Adjutant-General, Sir Spencer Ewart initiated a change in the method of calling up the Reservists. Until this change was brought about, the arrangement had been that, on mobilisation being proclaimed, an order, directing him to rejoin, was sent *by post* from his depot to each Reservist, together with a railway warrant for his journey and a post-office order for subsistence money while en route.

Under the scheme of acceleration, this railway warrant and the post-office order (marked " negotiable only on mobilisation ") were permanently attached to the identity certificate, which the Reservist always carries on his person, and the man had standing orders that, directly mobilisation was proclaimed, he was to detach his railway warrant, cash his post-office order at the nearest post-office, and start immediately for his depot without waiting for further instructions. The result of this arrangement, which was carried out in conjunction with the Railway Companies and Postal Authorities, was that,

when mobilisation was ordered in 1914, large numbers of men reached their depots and other destinations the same evening, mobilisation being accelerated by perhaps forty-eight hours. Similarly all Reserve officers were warned in advance exactly where to proceed upon mobilisation and what duties they were to take up. Everyone being told off in advance to a definite job.

Anyone who was travelling by rail on August 3 and 4, 1914, will remember meeting scores of these men. The first-class railway carriages were full of them, and between them and the Territorials going into camp, and holiday-makers going to and fro, every railway station in the country was in a state of animated bustle.

Officers in the Reserve who had been selected for special duties all knew not only what their duties were to be but where to go and to whom to report. Many of them had been through special courses and, on the other hand, those with exceptional knowledge had been giving many hours of their time during the previous three years to training others. Each officer on the Reserve had in his possession written instructions that he was to assume duty without waiting for orders on the first day of a general mobilisation, that is the day following that on which a general mobilisation has been ordered by Royal Proclamation. These arrangements had for the most part been in force for at least three years.

Speaking generally, in addition to the Quartermaster-General's work, much of what Cowans was doing between 1912 and 1914 was such as in other Armies would be considered the work of the General Staff. While it is of course true that the foundations of Lord Haldane's schemes of reorganisation were laid before Cowans returned to the War Office from India and most of the

changes had already been brought about, yet during the four years immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities he played a worthy and valuable part in helping to perfect the new machine and bring it to the very high state in which the outbreak of War found it. As Q.M.G. he displayed the same admirable qualities that had proved so useful in rounding off corners, smoothing angles, and tying up loose ends when he was directing the Territorial Force.

Amongst the problems that engaged his attention was that of the feeding, clothing and quartering of the Indian troops. It was generally recognised by soldiers that India would be asked to send Armies to the West should a war occur in Europe. When this did take place the smoothness with which all the arrangements worked is another tribute to Cowans. Doubtless his experience in India on the Staff and in command of men was of great value to him. We certainly owe to him the prompt and opportune arrival of the India Corps on the French front; and it is now generally admitted that it was an important factor in our ultimate success.

Up to about 1906 it was a general assumption that our troops would always have to fight in a distant theatre of war, in which case the time taken to transport them to their war stations would of course depend entirely on ships. When, however, it became evident that we might have to fight on the Continent of Europe, the time taken to mobilise would depend, first of all, as we have already seen, on the rapidity with which the Adjutant-General could mobilise the Army, the Q.M.G. get it to its war stations, and the Navy pilot it safely across the Channel. What was to be done with it when it reached the appointed rendezvous was of course entirely a matter for the Opera-

tions Branch and would be settled long before in conjunction with the French General Staff. The War stations in France of the British Army were roughly a triangle with its base fixed on Rouen and Amiens, on the left of the French.

It is worth recalling that in 1906 two months were allowed for mobilisation; in 1911 the period allowed was fifteen days; we have it on the authority of Lord Haldane that Cowans succeeded in reducing this to twelve.

When we remember how even hours, indeed minutes, were vital in those August days of 1914, this achievement alone entitles Cowans to a place in history and to the gratitude of posterity. Many of those who earned laurels in France are content to forget the work, and neglect, or permit to be neglected, the widow of the man who by his skill gave them their opportunity.

The same might be said of the politicians at home, but then no one expects from them the generous praise in success and comradeship in misfortune that has ever been the chivalrous pride of the fighting man.

§ 5

It will, in view of after events, be of interest to examine in some detail the plans made for the despatch of the Expeditionary Force.

In order to get the famous time-table exact no pains were spared. In 1912, for instance, an Artillery Brigade, a Regiment of Cavalry, a Howitzer Battery, an Ammunition Column and a Cavalry Field Ambulance were actually sent down to Southampton, put on board ship and taken off. The operation took exactly one night.

Staff Rides, as they are called, took place at regular intervals in France in order to test plans and make the Staff Officers concerned personally familiar with the ground on which their plans would have to be carried out. No training could be more valuable. Not only did they become familiar with the country, but they realised any unusual features and were therefore enabled to anticipate difficulties likely to arise. Moreover, to work out a time-table from maps is one thing; to cover the prescribed ground in the time laid down is very often quite another, as many people who have outlined a delightful Continental tour or a motor or yachting trip have often discovered. Even Messrs. Cook and the inevitable Mr. Murray are not always reliable guides, and the best contour maps can prove a delusion and a snare.

Based on these and similar tests the programme for the despatch of the Expeditionary Force was timed to last, from beginning to end, exactly fifteen days. Three days were allowed for mobilisation, and the movements of the fighting troops were timed to occupy twelve.

This of course was acting on the assumption that we were at once to put six Divisions in the field. When the time came we did not do so, for reasons that will be mentioned later. But as a matter of fact the six were ready and could have been got overseas in the same time as the four.

The arrangements were that the Fourth Division was to move last and it had a separate period allotted to it on the eleventh and twelfth days; the Transport Columns were to go on the thirteenth and fourteenth days.

It is fitting that here should be paid a tribute to the little band of brilliant specialists who perfected the details of this extraordinary plan. They were unbelievably

small in number; many of them were in those days of comparatively junior rank. All of them are, by the necessities of the service, anonymous. One or perhaps two people have, in a spirit that is happily not characteristic of the Army, gone out of their way to say that Cowans did little and his Staff did much if not all. There never has been a piece of notable work done in this world but someone was found to say it had really been done by the anonymous man (they always know who he was) behind the scene. We have heard it of Napoleon, Wellington, Nelson and many lesser men. There are even people who insist that Shakespeare was a syndicate.

Inevitably every man owes much to his Staff. When he reaches a position in which he is free to pick and choose them, if they are not good it is his own fault. General Campbell (Lieutenant-General Sir William Pitcairn Campbell, K.C.B.), one of the best chiefs any soldier ever served, used to say, "When one is top dog, one can get things done." Quite so. But how many "top dogs" know how to select their subordinates or who, having got them, know how to treat them! Cowans could do both. We have seen how unerring was his judgment in choosing men; we have seen how he gave them complete freedom to do their job in their own way; how he was accessible to the humblest as to the highest of his subordinates; how he would welcome and accept suggestions and advice from anyone, and how, above all, he would always back his subordinates and never let them down. To have loyal willing subordinates you must be a loyal, human chief. Cowans was loyalty and friendliness personified.

Amongst the hundreds of letters received by the authors regarding the men and his work there is on the technical side one recurring burden, and that is his

extraordinary gift of getting the utmost and finest work from those under him. Testimony from senior officers has been quoted. That received from his juniors is equally emphatic. The following letter from Colonel W. K. Tarver, C.B., is typical. It is quoted as representative of the point of view of the comparatively junior officer. Colonel Tarver served on the Q.M.G.'s Staff at the War Office before, during and since the War, and therefore speaks with more than ordinary authority. He writes;

"Apart from his own individual ability, he had the happy knack of keeping people under him in good temper and ready to do their best for him, by his own extraordinary cheerfulness and the utter absence of hurry or panic. He knew how to concentrate on the big things that mattered and left his Directors to run their own Departments without interference, and at the same time would stand by them when they wanted backing. Every one of us that had anything to do with him could hardly say too much in his praise."

Instances have been known where men of considerable ability never receive the best service because those under them, knowing if anything goes wrong they will receive all the blame, never dare take any risks. It is one of the curses of the Army and the Civil Service: everyone plays for safety. Army history reveals many examples of officers commanding Battalions who have not disdained to hide behind a Company Quartermaster-Sergeant or even an orderly-room clerk!

It is true that generally speaking subordinates do the bulk of the work; it is true that with success the Chief receives the greater share of the rewards but, with failure, he receives *all* the blame. Subordinates may, and frequently do, share his success. It is seldom that they have

any part of the burden of failure to bear. This is right. The " top dog " has the honour and glory ; the responsibility and the punishment, if failure comes, must therefore be his also.

No one was ever more ready than Cowans to admit how much he owed to the loyal, able and indefatigable services of his Staff. He had himself the great advantage of having been apprenticed to Railway Transport during the South African War, and from 1912 onward he had at the War Office as one of his principal assistants a man trained in the same hard school.

These few men, then, with the Quartermaster-General at their head, had not only improvised a perfect organisation but one that from August 4 onward worked marvellously. If, later, it had to be replaced by a semi-civilian organisation it was because by that time the War had reached proportions so gigantic that no prevision could possibly have foreseen them.

The Movements of the Expeditionary Force was the most perfectly worked-out and complex piece of Staff-work ever carried out by the British Army. Amongst other elements of perfection it had extraordinary flexibility, which was just as well, as in the very beginning its elasticity was to be subjected to a most searching test.

§ 6

It was to our disadvantage in 1914 that secret mobilisation is impossible in this country. It has to be notified by Royal Proclamation in the Press. The enemy is thus given ample warning of our intentions.

During the period of tension preceding the declaration of war many people were gravely concerned by what appeared to be the indecision of the British Government.

A number of high officers inside the War Office felt very strongly that not only was the honour of the country but the honour of the Army involved, and had it been decided to leave their French comrades in the lurch, it was their intention to resign immediately and to offer their services to the French Army. Cowans sympathised with this attitude and took upon himself to represent the matter to Mr. Asquith who was his personal friend.

We know now that we owe it to Mr. Winston Churchill and to Prince Louis of Battenberg (Admiral His Serene Highness the Prince Louis of Battenberg, afterwards Marquess of Milford Haven, G.C.B.) that the Navy was mobilised and ready. It is a vast debt and had the Navy not been ready the Army could not have moved as rapidly as it did.

On Sunday, August 2, 1914, Sir Edward Grey (the Viscount Grey of Falloden, K.G.), who was staying with Lord Haldane at 28, Queen Anne's Gate, was dining with his host who is also, as is well known, his old and intimate friend. The scene is so historic and its details and happenings so characteristic and so English that every item is worthy of record. Picture it: That quiet, spacious, dignified old house of the period which gives the street its name. Its air of the student, the thinker, the man of affairs. Its view over St. James's Park which on that Sunday evening in August would be full of summer's beauty and crowded with amiable, friendly citizens not one of whom dreamt that it was the last truly happy and contented Sunday they would spend for many a long day.

Inside the house, within range of the murmur of the voices of the crowd, the two statesmen: grave; preoccupied a little; knowing vast issues were in the balance;

by no means lacking in cheerfulness or in repose. About 8.30 a red despatch box is brought in for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The heedless crowd in the Park had not observed the messenger of fate as he hurried over from the Foreign Office. The quiet man-servant brings the box in between the courses. He is well-accustomed to the arrival of such for his master and his master's distinguished guest. The hot hush that broods over London on an early August evening is in the room as the box is immediately unlocked and opened. One glance is sufficient.

It is war.

The two men—one of whom was the only man in the world who could have saved the situation for so long—quietly finish their meal as is the English fashion.

Everything that could honourably be done to avert disaster had been done. If an evil fate must come let it be met serenely.

The two then walked quietly across to Downing Street, and, after some slight delay, saw the Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, with whom was Lord Crewe.

Presently the Prime Minister—whom it will be remembered was also Secretary of State for War—asked Lord Haldane (an ex-War Secretary) what it was advisable to do. Lord Haldane's advice was that the Prime Minister should allow him to summon the Army Council for 11 o'clock the next (Monday) morning and give him written authority to preside at the meeting and act temporarily as Secretary of State.

It was clear that Mr. Asquith would be overwhelmed with business in the Cabinet and in the House of Commons, and it was therefore out of the question that he should personally preside at this historic meeting. This

course was agreed to and Lord Haldane and Lord Grey returned home.

The next morning, Monday, August 3, a few minutes before eleven o'clock Lord Haldane went over to the War Office, walked into his old room, sat down on his old chair and then, as is his custom, lit a cigar. Presently the Army Council assembled, and Lord Haldane said genially and with his usual easy-going friendliness, "Well, Generals, you must mobilise at once. I order it in the name of the Cabinet and the Prime-Minister-Secretary-of-State; here is my authority signed by him."

Strictly speaking this was what soldiers would describe as a little bit of a wangle, because, as the Cabinet had not met since the morning of the day before, it could not have sanctioned Lord Haldane's acting appointment.

The various members of the Army Council then began to present their aspect of the case. It will cost me so many millions said one; yes, it will cost me so many more said another. "Nevertheless," said Lord Haldane, "go ahead. Are the telegrams and so on ready in their pigeon-holes as they were when I left here two years ago?"

"Yes."

"Right. Mobilise the Army; mobilise the Territorial Force; mobilise the Special Reserve; mobilise the O.T.C."

It was done. By noon the telegraphic orders were out and the British Expeditionary Force had begun to move.

Cowans had of course been very prominent at this Army Council meeting. At last his work was to be tested and by a test such as no similar work had been subjected to in history.

He now found himself at the beginning of fourteen of the most strenuous days of his life, days in which,

as it turned out, the whole future of the country, of the Empire, of the world itself depended.

Had the Quartermaster-General or his Department failed, what would have happened?

One and all the War Office Staff worked, ate and (if they could snatch an hour) slept in their offices. The place was full of beds; the preoccupation was such that personal material things did not seem to exist. All count of time was lost; and if you asked any of them now for an exact record of what happened on any particular date he could not give it to you.

For the general public the great struggle did not commence until between eleven and twelve o'clock on Tuesday night, August 4, when war was officially declared.

For the soldier it had begun some thirty-four hours earlier.

The contrast between the inside of the War Office and the immense marching, singing, hoping, despairing, waiting crowds outside in Whitehall and Parliament Square was as great as anything in life could well be. The public, puzzled and mystified by the delay, impatiently wondered; the soldier already . . . knew.

The public attitude has been summed up in the description of an incident that will bear repeating here:

"A short time after eleven o'clock on Tuesday night, I was in a dense crowd in Parliament Square watching the brightly-lit Palace of Westminster, and it was then that a Londoner with a cockney accent summed up the situation in the cockney's own inimitable way: 'What are they waiting for?' his companion, a young woman, asked. Like a flash came the answer, 'Waiting for the Germans to kick 'em!'"[1]

[1] *The Melody of God*, Desmond Mountjoy, p. 210.

That was the popular point of view, and, as sometimes happens, it was somewhat wide of the mark. What we were really doing was to hold out for Peace to the fifty-ninth second of the last minute, and history will justify if not praise us for doing so.

Yet the talking representatives in the House of Commons had not been idle; or rather those who led them had not, and the Navy was already vanishing into the mists of the North Sea; the Army had already begun to set forth for the death-filled fields of France.

For reasons of policy the Government would not allow the Army Council to have its way and stop the Territorials going into camp, which the greater bulk of them do during the first week in August. It was all part of the wise and deliberate policy of avoiding as far as possible to the last extremity any action that might appear provocative.

It was obviously a very great inconvenience and disadvantage having them scattered in camps all over the length and breadth of England instead of under immediate control at their respective homes or depots. However, it could not be helped.

When eventually the order for their recall was authorised by the Cabinet it was too late. Priceless time had been lost. It led to immense trouble on the railways—probably the greatest piece of trouble they experienced throughout the whole War! The trains, instead of being available for the mobilisation and despatch of the Expeditionary Force, were scattered all over the country collecting the Territorials, and everything was delayed until they were got back to their depots. What difficulties and confusion this caused will be evident when we remember the exactitude with which the despatch of the Army from

these shores had been worked out. Had the Staff work been anything less than perfect that blunder might have cost us dear.

It had long been settled that, in the event of sending an Expeditionary Force to France, Southampton would be our chief port, and it accordingly became Port No. 1. Oddly enough no provision seems to have been made beforehand for increased railway access direct to the docks. There was only one double line, so the laying down of an additional line was immediately started, and, such was the expedition used, it became available on the fourth day of mobilisation.

On August 9 the first shipload of stores of any kind reached Havre from Newhaven.

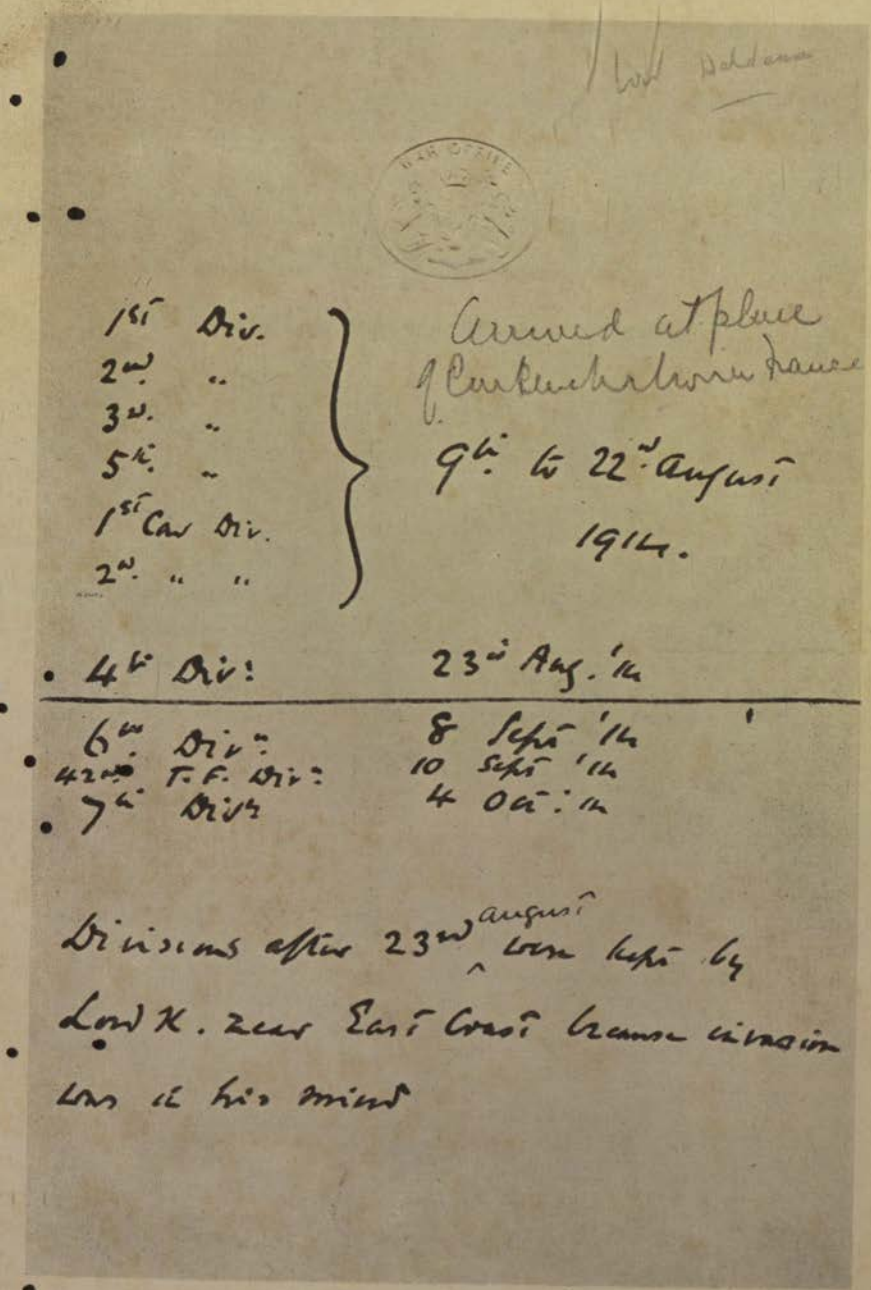
On the same day the fighting troops began leaving Southampton, and between August 9 and August 22 the First, Second, Third, Fifth, and First and Second Cavalry Divisions arrived at their War Stations in France.

Two Regular Divisions and one Territorial were retained by Lord Kitchener near the East Coast. He had invasion in mind and was taking no risks until the Navy had established its supremacy in home waters.

The Sixth Division, however, arrived at its War Station in France on September 8; the Forty-second Territorial Division on September 10, and the Seventh Division on October 4.

§ 7

But before the Old Contemptibles got safely across to France there were many anxious moments for Cowans and his Staff.



[*By permission of Lord Haldane.*

Autograph Memorandum giving details of the despatch of the B.E.F., written by Sir John Cowans for Lord Haldane.

Vol. I., p. 280.

The delay over the movements of the Territorial Force was not the only one. The Admiralty had been notified on August 5 that troops would begin to move on the 7th and had replied that transports would be ready and protection available. They were then acquainted with the fact that two precious days had already been lost and that operations had been postponed till the 9th.

Such a blow at the outset would have upset many well-laid plans and disheartened many able Staffs. As it was it did neither one nor the other. Moreover, worse was to come. There was a three days' fog in the Channel —in August! Nothing was of course said about it at the time: the fact however is a striking one in view of the feeling so prevalent during the earlier stages of the War that the weather always fought on the side of the Germans! Some of the first destroyers which convoyed the ships had been injured; submarines were reported off the Isle of Wight, and the Admiralty would not agree to allow the transports to cross without protection. All transports, of course, moved at night and as fast as possible.

The weather, accidents, submarines and the Examination Service combined to increase the tragic delay, already great enough.

What this meant at Southampton can be imagined. For the first day of twenty-four hours after the troops started moving, one train every ten minutes passed into the docks; only one was late and that by five minutes. For the following nineteen consecutive days ninety trains per day (twenty-four hours) entered Southampton. With this inrush even an hour's delay was serious, yet at one moment during the fog everything was twenty-four hours late. This meant an enormous accumulation of men at the port.

The Quartermaster-General went down to Southampton by special train. The Port Commandant (Colonel A. B. Hamilton, C.B. [1]) walked into his office and found Cowans sitting there smoking and examining the causes of delay on the spot. As a result he proposed to order mobilisation to be suspended for twenty-four hours. He was, however, dissuaded by his Movements experts from doing so and gave them a day in which to surmount their difficulties. As a matter of fact, had it not been for the initial loss of two days caused by the Cabinet's decision regarding the Territorials (which Cowans had stoutly resisted), this hitch would hardly have mattered. Cowans was not in the least rattled, nor were his Staff at the War Office or at Southampton. He returned to London and kept a dinner engagement.

The fog lifted; the difficulties about destroyers were overcome and the flexibility of the scheme was proved triumphantly by the fact that, in spite of the interruption, things went on as if no hitch had taken place, and ultimately, instead of one day being lost, two were saved. The Fourth Division, which had been concentrated in the neighbourhood of Harrow, went after instead of before the transport, which had been hustled out of the way; that was the only alteration made in the whole plan. The Division duly arrived at its War Station on August 23.

The regularity with which the troop trains reached Southampton is most remarkable when it is borne in mind that at this stage none of the railways except the London and South Western (the Southern Railway) had any experience or skill in moving troops, and indeed some of them proved rather slow in acquiring either. The

[1] Died, 1918.

London and South Western had of course had a good deal of actual experience arising out of the movements of troops at Aldershot and on Salisbury Plain.

It is only fair to record here that all the Railway Movements in France—that is, from the French ports to the rendezvous—worked as efficiently and smoothly as did our own.

Nor must the magnificent work of the Royal Navy go unmentioned. We will quote Sir Julian Stafford Corbett, the Director of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence. In his *Official History of the Great War: Naval Operations* he writes:

"Before the Navy had had even time to get out its commerce protection cruisers, it found itself saddled with a task which in difficulty and magnitude was quite beyond its experience. The question whether such an operation was a legitimate risk of war before a decided command of home waters had been established had long been in debate. Still, the risk had been measured, and so vital did our own and the French General Staff consider it to get our Army upon the left of the French line at the earliest possible moment that the risk, with all its hazards, had been accepted by the Admiralty. During the past three years every detail had been worked out between the two Services for landing the Force in the north-west of France, and a plan of operation settled which promised to reduce the risk to a minimum. For a landing in Belgium, which would involve a much higher sea risk, there was no plan at all.

"The general idea involved the use of several ports of departure and two of arrival. The lines of passage consequently varied, but all were within waters that lay well for cover by the Fleet. The main port of embarkation

for troops in England, as well as for horses and hospital ships, was Southampton, and thence the bulk of the transports were to make for Havre, the main port of arrival, though some proceeded up to Rouen and a few to Boulogne.

" A special feature of the plan, in order to minimise the risk, was that there were to be no convoys. Transports were to sail singly or in pairs as they filled up, and to proceed independently to their destination. The system of protection, in fact, was the reverse of that which the French had been employing in the Mediterranean. [1] There was to be no escort: everything depended on the Covering Squadrons. The plan was new. To a certain extent it had been used, somewhat precariously and not without loss, by the Japanese ten years before, but our more favourable geographical position enabled us to carry the principle to its logical conclusion.

" The system of cover was based on closing both ends of the Channel against raids, while the Grand Fleet took up a position from which it could strike the High Seas Fleet if the Germans should choose to risk it in an effort to prevent our Army joining hands with that of France."

§ 8

The transports carried two days' food for every man and horse on board. Of course the voyage normally only took a few hours, but the Quartermaster-General would not risk our men going hungry should there be a delay from fog, submarines or any other cause.

[1] Just as the transport of the Algerian Army was completed, that of our own Expeditionary Force began.

This was a rule he stuck to throughout the War.

The troops were to be fed and cared for at all costs. We have seen how he practised that magnificent old Army tradition as far back as the days when he was a subaltern at Woolwich.

Only our indebtedness to the Navy exceeds what we owe to our Mercantile Marine. We do know that all the great Steamship Companies such as the Peninsular and Oriental, the Cunard and the White Star rendered service to the Government by placing their fleets of passenger steamers at the disposal of the Army Council for the conveyance of troops to all parts of the world, or as cruisers or hospital ships.

Owing, however, to the secrecy observed it is almost impossible to find out what vessels carried our men in that fateful journey in August from which so many of them never returned. All the papers in connection with the ships during the War, their logbooks and other records, are in the possession of the Admiralty.

We do as it happens know that as early as August 11 the P. & O. ship *Novara*, Captain H. R. Hetherington, R.N.R., left London for Southampton at short notice. The Irish Guards and half a Battalion of the Coldstream Guards were embarked at Southampton and landed at Hayre the following morning. The voyage was made without incident.

On August 12, fifteen ships carried 587 officers, 16,936 men, 1,166 horses, 417 vehicles, 71 motors and 213 bicycles.

On August 13, eighteen ships sailed from Southampton carrying 664 officers, 19,849 men, 1,262 horses, 383 vehicles, 20 motors and 219 bicycles.

On August 22, sixteen ships carried about the same

number of officers, men and gear, but with the addition of 72 guns.

By August 26 we had sent to France 2,215 officers, 63,599 men, 7,813 horses, 1,486 vehicles, 111 motors. 710 bicycles and 78 guns.

§ 9

All this time Cowans was naturally immersed in work outside the immediate job in hand. The Cabinet wanted to know all sorts of things and many meetings had to be attended.

The Quartermaster-General was the last man in the world to pretend that he knew everything. He had none of the stupid false pride of smaller men. During the terrible three weeks when the Expeditionary Force was being despatched he dealt directly with the officer or his Staff personally responsible for Railway Movements took him to Cabinet Meetings and put him up to answer questions concerning details which he himself made no pretence of knowing. It was this reliance on his subordinates—after he had thoroughly tried and tested them—that ensured to him always their utmost service.

It was the plain admission that he did not pose as a know-all that enabled his superiors to realise that when he did claim knowledge it could be relied upon.

The great work Cowans and his subordinates carried out so successfully in those early days of the War has for the most part been dismissed by historians in a few formal sentences.

That it escaped the attention of the British public was inevitable in the early stages of the War. Not only was there the secrecy in which it was shrouded, the

silence in which it moved—there followed the great tense dramatic hours to which it was but the prelude.

It was left to Mr. Churchill, the historian of the Navy, to pay the only tribute so far written that is worth quoting. He says :

" All went well, not a ship was sunk, not a man was drowned. All arrangements worked with the utmost smoothness and punctuality. The Army concentration was complete three days in advance of Sir John French's original undertaking to General Lanrezac ; and with such secrecy was the whole of the vast operation enshrouded that, on the evening of August 21, only a few hours before the British cavalry patrols were in contact with the Germans, General von Kluck, commanding the first German Army in Belgium, received from the Supreme Command no better information than the following :

A landing of British troops at Boulogne and their advance from about Lille must be reckoned with. It is believed that no landing of British troops on a big scale has yet taken place.' " [1]

Everything went with the precision of a perfected machine that had been subjected to unending tests and trials. It would be possible to mention the names of many who had a share in the work and deserved the greatest credit. Some few are still serving soldiers ; some who faithfully contributed are unknown—are of that great silent band who have worked unseen for the glory of England. Many, like the man who was then their Chief, have passed into the great Silence.

Wherever and whoever they are they can look back with solemn—almost wondering—pride to the sunset of

[1] *The World Crisis*, p. 259.

August the twenty-second, nineteen hundred and fourteen. At that moment the British Expeditionary Force, the Old Contemptibles—name of incomparable glory—were at their War Stations, nineteen days after the mobilisation orders had been issued. Only the brains, the superb organising ability, the consummate transport skill of Cowans made this possible. By his work priceless time had been saved. Time which perhaps in the ultimate analysis saved the Allies from defeat. The work he had planned, the machinery he had forged, the men he had chosen to work it, were acquitted of their great task.

He sent out in an unbelievably short time the most perfectly equipped Army that has ever taken the field. When the utmost credit is given to all to whom credit is due, history must finally write that, speaking broadly, this perfectly fulfilled task was the work of one man.

Having sent forth this matchless little band of one hundred thousand men, he watched it grow day by day until it numbered some four millions. He watched it spread over France, Belgium, Egypt, Mesopotamia—over half the world, and for four long harassed years he kept it, fed and clothed and transported it as no other Army has ever been cared for in the history of the world.

END OF VOLUME ONE

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